THE NEW
INDIAN
EXPRESS
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The New Indian Express
Wishes its readers
Merry Christmas

W.H.O. ASKS COUNTRIES TO RAMP UP SURVEILLANCE AS COVID CASES SURGE

The world health agency on Sunday asked countries in Southeast Asia to increase monitoring amid an uptick in Covid-19 cases

TRACKING IS IMPORTANT AS VIRUS EVOLVES

The Covid-19 virus is evolving and is circulating in all countries globally. "While current evidence suggests that the additional public health risk posed by JN.1 (a new variant of Covid virus) is low, we must continue to track the evolution of these viruses to tailor our response," the WHO said. It urged countries to strengthen surveillance and ensure the data is shared

OVER 650 NEW CASES, 1 DEATH IN 24 HOURS

- In recent weeks, JN.1 was reported in multiple countries, and its prevalence has been increasing rapidly. Experts anticipate this variant to cause an increase in Covid-19 cases, especially since it's the winter season
- India reported 656 new Covid cases on Sunday, taking the total number of active cases in the country to 3,742. One death was reported from Kerala

220.6 cr

DOSES OF COVID VACCINES ADMINISTRED IN INDIA SO FAR, AS PER OFFICIAL DATA

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Haste makes waste for new WFI panel as sports ministry steps in

IOA asked to form ad-hoc panel; under pressure, Brij Bhushan says he is leaving the sport

FIROZ MIRZA @Chennai

THREE days after the Wrestling Federation of India had completed its election process that led to more protests by star wrestlers Sakshi Malik and Bajrang Punia, the sports minister stepped in and asked the executive committee to abstain from administering and managing day-to-day affairs of the federation.

The sports ministry took this decision on Sunday in view of the certain actions taken by the newly-elected EC after elections. The sports ministry was not happy with hasty announcement of nationals (U15 and U20). The ministry had written a letter to the Indian Olympic Association listing out its reason for such a step. The sports ministry also pointed out that the have taken "note of the compelling current situation arising out of the influence and control of the WFI's former office bearers, serious concerns have arisen about the governance and integrity of the WFI." The ministry has requested IOA to form an ad-hoc committee to run the affairs of the WFI. The ministry also felt that what they have done is within the Constitution of India and provisions in the Sports Code gives them that powers.

Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh during a press meet in New Delhi | PARVEEN NEGI

Sakshi welcomes it

Sakshi Malik welcomed the WFI's suspension. "It is the first step towards something good happening. I hope the government understands more for what cause we were fighting," she said. Bajrang Punia, who had returned his Padma Shri on Friday said he would not take it back as yet

Interestingly, WFI has already been banned by the United World Wrestling for government interference. It needs to be seen how the UWW reacts to this development.

Though many were taken by surprise, former president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, the man in the eye of the storm, apparently had an inkling of what was in the store for him. Having left for Gonda, Uttar Pradesh only on Saturday morning, Brij Bhushan returned to New Delhi in the morning even before the order was issued. As the developments throughout the day caught the wrestling fraternity off guard, the BJP member of parliament refrained from commenting until he met the party's national president JP Nadda after which he told media that he is taking retirement from the sport.

The UP MP is expected to meet Home Minister Amit Shah to discuss the ministry's decisions. Sanjay Singh, Brij Bhushan's loyalist, comfortably won the contest for the top post beating Anita Sheoran, a former Commonwealth Games gold medallist backed by the protesting wrestlers. His faction won 13 out of 15 posts. Prem Chand Lochab and Devender Kadyan from rival faction won secretary and senior vice-president's posts. Sanjay Singh said he would discuss the issue with sports ministry. P11

CM'S ANNUAL VISIT TO PULIVENDULA

CM Jagan offered floral tributes to his father YS Rajasekhara Reddy at YSR Ghat in Idupulapaya on Sunday. Keeping with his Christmas tradition, he met leaders of his home constituency

Focus of the meeting was to reach out the people in a better manner, highlighting the welfare schemes and development programmes of the YSRC government

Further, he launched a slew of projects, including the ₹11.6 crore road widening and beautification works, the ₹5.5 crore YSR Park, and the newly-built police station worth ₹2 crore | P4

Teen dies during a fight over cricket

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Nellore

A 14-year-old boy died after he was attacked by another teenager during an altercation that ensued between them while they were playing cricket. The incident took place at Zakeer Hussain Nagar in Nellore city on Sunday. The deceased was identified as Farheed.

According to police, Farheed and Farhan (16), along with other teenagers from the same colony were playing cricket. A heated argument erupted between Farhan and Farheed and quickly escalated.

Farhan allegedly hit Farheed on his chest and head. This resulted in the 14-year-old collapsing on the spot. The other children immediately alerted Farheed's parents. Following this, Farheed was rushed to a hospital where the doctors declared him dead. On receiving information, police rushed to Farhan's house of Farhan and sought details on the issue. Later, Farheed's body was shifted to the Government General Hospital in Nellore for post-mortem.

CI M Bobby stated that a case was registered, based on a complaint from Farheed's parents.

Retired police officer shot dead in J&K mosque while offering *azaan*

FAYAZ WANI @Srinagar

A retired police officer on Sunday was shot dead by terrorists while he was giving the call for morning prayer (*azaan*) in a mosque in Jammu and Kashmir's Baramulla district.

Mohammad Shafi Mir, 71, was shifted to a nearby hospital, where doctors declared him "brought dead". Immediately after the incident, a contingent of police, CRPF and army rushed to the area and launched a search operation to track down the attackers.

The postmortem of the deceased police officer has revealed that Mir was shot with a 12-bore rifle and had splinter injuries, police sources said. "We are investigating all angles including any possible rivalry," sources added.

Mir, who retired as senior superintendent of police, regularly used to give the *azaan* at the local mosque.

He had retired in 2012 and was living in his native village. He is survived by wife, two sons and a daughter.

A pall of gloom descended the entire village as the news of his death spread and everyone is mourning.

Mir's cousin Abdul Karim said he heard a loud noise through the loudspeaker while his cousin was giving the call for *azaan*.

Security personnel gather at the mosque where the retired senior superintendent of police was killed in Baramulla on Sunday | ANI

"At first I thought he might have fallen due to high blood pressure and didn't pay much attention. However, a few minutes later, my daughter came running to me saying 'uncle Shafi has been shot dead'."

The killing has evoked widespread condemnation from political parties and even from separatist Hurriyat Conference.

"Such killings are a blot on humanity and bring disgrace to the people and place where they are committed," a spokesman of Hurriyat Conference led by Mirwaiz Umar Farooq said.

The family of the slain police officer have sought justice and demanded that killers be brought to account for this senseless inhumane act.

"Investigating agencies must thoroughly probe the incident and ensure that such incidents are not repeated," the locals said.

Army search goes on

The army continued its search operation in and around Poonch and Rajouri districts for terrorists involved in the killing of four soldiers. On Thursday, two army vehicles were ambushed killing four soldiers

MARITIME SCARE

Another vessel with Indian crew hit in latest Red Sea attack

MAYANK SINGH @New Delhi

A day after a Liberia-flagged merchant vessel M/V Chem Pluto carrying 21 Indian crew members came under a drone attack off the coast of Gujarat, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) said another merchant ship with 25 Indians came under attack in the southern Red Sea.

According to the US CENTCOM, the vessel, M/V SAIBABA, reported to have been hit by a one-way attack drone launched by Yemen-based Houthi militants in the southern Red Sea on Saturday. A Norwegian-flagged tanker was also similarly hit, but none of the crew members in either ship was injured. "At approximately 8 p.m. (Sanaa time), U.S. Naval Forces Central Command received reports from two ships in the Southern Red Sea that they were under attack," the US CENTCOM posted on X. US Navy's destroyer USS Laboon responded to the distress calls from the ships, it stated. The CENTCOM called M/V SAIBABA, "a Gabon-owned, Indian-flagged crude oil tanker", but Indian officials clarified it was a Gabon-flagged vessel. "These attacks represent the 14th and 15th attacks on commercial shipping by Houthi militants since October 17," the CENTCOM said. The CENTCOM is one of the 11 unified combat commands of the US military having West Asia, Central Asia and parts of South Asia under its area of responsibility.

Iran behind attack off Guj coast: US

The US said Iran was behind Saturday's attack on M/V Chem Pluto. Citing newly released intelligence, the US has said Iran was "deeply involved" in the planning of the Houthi attacks and has supplied weapons to the group. Iran has denied the US accusations

Houthis, backed by Iran, an arch-rival of Israel, have vowed to continue their attacks on merchant vessels in and around the Red Sea until Israel stops its war in Gaza.

On Saturday, the Indian Navy responded to a distress call from the merchant vessel M/V Chem Pluto, which came under a suspected drone attack. The attack caused an explosion that set off a fire onboard the ship. The Indian Navy has launched an investigation into the attack.

Vijayanagara era inscription lies in neglect

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Vijayawada

AN inscription issued during the reign of Vijayanagara Emperor Sri Krishnadevaraya was found in a state of utter neglect near a dilapidated temple at an abandoned village -- Gundala -- located in a forest, around five kilometres away from Koppunuru village in Macherla mandal, Palnadu district.

Archeologist Dr E Sivanagireddy examined the ruins of the temple and the inscription on Sunday after receiving information from local heritage activists Satish Pavuluri, Sivasankar Manimela and Yuganadhreddy Durgempudi.

He explained that the inscription, which was partly buried in the ground, dated back to 1516 CE. This was the year when Sri Krishnadevaraya seized the forts of Kondaveedu, Bellamkonda and Nagarjunakonda.

According to the inscription, local chief Basavanayaka, who was authorised to rule Nagarjunakonda Seema, had donated the revenues of Malle Gundala village (not in existence now), for the upkeep of Tiruvengalanatha temple. Basvanayaka also issued another inscription at Bellamkondavaripalem village near Koppunur.

Remains of a 16th century temple were also found near the inscription. The temple mandapa was visible up to the plinth level and there were sculptures of Veerabhadra and Bhadrakali. P4

Lack of blankets leaves welfare hostel students quivering in Kurnool district

K MADHU SUDHAKAR @Kurnool

SEVERAL children living at the BC Welfare Hostels in Kurnool district are having sleepless nights as they do not have sufficient bed sheets despite the dropping mercury level. Some of the hostels reportedly even have damaged doors and windows leading to mosquito menace.

In the erstwhile Kurnool district, a total of 162 hostels, spanning pre-metric and post-metric levels, are overseen by various government welfare departments, including SC (Scheduled Class), ST (Scheduled Tribe), BC (Backward Class) and military welfare. Around 60 per cent of these hostels operate out of rented buildings.

A boy at a welfare hostel in Kurnool district curls into a ball while sleeping to keep himself warm | EXPRESS

Around 17,00o students, pursuing their education in nearby government schools and colleges, depend on these hostels for accommodation.

Yet, these hostels lack even the most basic facilities such as toilets and bathrooms.

While SC and BC Welfare Hostels outside Kurnool district have distributed bed sheets to the children, as many as 31 BC welfare hostels in Kurnool district are yet to receive the winter essentials. This has resulted in a few children sleeping on the floor and battling the chilly winds that seep through the damaged windows and doors. P4

SUSTAINABLE LIVING

Farm-to-table food concept at Navodaya School

K KALYAN KRISHNA KUMAR @Vijayawada

A unique farm-to-table food concept is being implemented at the PM SHRI Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, a Central Government Educational Institution, in Veleru village of Bapulapadu mandal, Krishna district with students cultivating vegetables organically on the campus.

Around two acres of land within the school premises was levelled so that various vegetables like brinjal, okra, chilli, tomato (country), cabbage, sorrel leaves, amaranth, and spinach could be grown. Vegetable waste from the hostel mess is used as compost, while waste water from the RO plant is diverted for irrigation.

Students tending to their kitchen garden at PM SHRI Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya in Veleru village of Bapulapadu mandal in Krishna District | EXPRESS

Students and teachers actively participate in cultivating the vegetables. They engage in tasks such as cleaning and watering the plants during the weekly gardening period.

School principal Mundlamuri Srinivasa Rao said, "In addition to education and sports, students' participation in organic vegetable cultivation raises awareness about the challenges faced by farmers in providing food to the entire country. It also fosters a strong work ethic among students."

A total of 1,000 kgs of brinjal, approximately 250 kgs chilli, and 200-300 kgs tomato, 200 kgs okra and a huge quantity of green vegetables have been harvested since August 2023. Part of the harvest was sent to other schools twice.

Class XI student V Sai Dinakar expressed happiness on being a part of the activity. "This way I can learn about how plants are grown and farming is done. The feeling of being so close to nature is beautiful." Another student, Poranki Siva Rama Raju, explained, "We now understand the value of good food and avoid wasting any while eating meals in the mess after working in the garden."

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS
AMARAVATI

ALMANAC TODAY

Monday: 25/12/2023 **Year:** Sri Subhakritu **Aayanam:** Dakshinayanam
Rutuvu: Sharad **Masam:** Margasira **Paksham:** Sukla **Tithi:** Chaturdashi 05.47 am
Nakshatram: Rohini 08.41 pm **Durmuhurtham:** 12.29 pm - 01.13 pm
Varjyam: 01.32 pm - 03.10 pm **Rahukaalam:** 07.30 am - 09.00 pm

WEATHER WATCH

MIN	MAX
19°C	32°C

FORECAST
Sunny spells

Sunrise	06.33
Sunset	17.42
Moonrise	16.10
Moonset	05.49

St Peter's Cathedral and other churches decked up for the Christmas festivities in Vijayawada on Saturday | PRASANT MADUGULA

Churches illuminated, midnight prayers held

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Vijayawada

CHURCHES in the city were adorned in magnificent decorations in anticipation of Christmas celebrations on Monday.

St Peter's Lutheran Church East and West Parish, CSI St Paul's Basilica, St Paul's Centenary Churches, and Mother Mary Church in Gunadala illuminated the city with dazzling lights, creating a festive atmosphere for midnight prayers.

The morning prayers, held from 8 am to 10.30 pm, reflected the joyous anticipation of Jesus Christ's birth. Throughout the city, Christmas carols resonated as churches embraced the season with special prayers, creating a harmonious celebration.

The markets buzzed with activity as residents enthusiastically purchased special cakes, candles, Santa Claus costumes, and Christmas trees. Shopping malls and businesses contributed to the festive spirit by adorning colorful lights, stars, and various attractions to captivate customers.

Gunadala Church stood out as a significant attraction, drawing visitors with its timeless grandeur and craftsmanship. A special mass at this historic church aimed to spread happiness, joy, prosperity, and peace to all on Earth. Christians gathered at the church from Sunday midnight, extending the celebration until dawn.

Vice Chairman of the Planning Board, MLA Malladi Vishnu, conveyed Christmas wishes to the people of Central Constituency, honoring the birth of Lord Jesus Christ.

On Christmas, Krishna District Collector P Rajababu extended warm wishes, emphasizing the spirit of joy and togetherness. NTR District Collector S Dilli Rao urged people to lead a happy life by embracing the teachings of Jesus Christ, emphasizing selfless love.

Mayor of Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Rayana Bhagya Lakshmi and Commissioner Swapnil Dinkar Pundkar extended heartfelt Christmas wishes to the citizens. The mayor emphasized the essence of Christmas as service, peace, and happiness, highlighting Jesus Christ's teachings of forgiveness, love, and compassion.

The Commissioner expressed hope that the festive season would bring happiness and love to all families.

Vigil stepped up to curb making of rooster knives

SEB conducts raid on a rooster knives manufacturing unit in Eluru

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Vijayawada

AS the much-anticipated Sankranti festival approaches, rooster breeders and blacksmiths in the Godavari districts are gearing up for the traditional practice of providing trained country roosters and blades used in cockfights during the three-day celebration.

In Godavari districts, as well as parts of Krishna and NTR districts, it is customary for some rooster breeders to prepare roosters, known as 'Pandem Kollu,' for the blood sport. These roosters, sought after for their breed and weight, experience high demand during the festival, which is celebrated on January 14, 15, and 16.

Amidst the preparations, Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB) officials conducted a raid on a rooster knife manufacturing unit in Appanaveedu village of Pedapadu mandal in Eluru district. They apprehended a person for the illegal production of rooster knives. The raid resulted in the seizure of approximately ₹3 lakh worth of 1,420 rooster knives and related manufacturing equipment.

Reports indicate that large-scale celebrations are expected in certain villages of Godavari and Krishna districts during the festival. Organisers and political leaders from various parties are planning grand festivities.

"Ahead of Sankranti festival season, Special Enforcement Bureau, NTR and Krishna district police are conducting special raids to curb manufacturing of rooster knives. We have identified problematic villages in Godavari, NTR, and Krishna districts are increased vigilance," said a senior police officer who spoke on the condition of anonymity. Preparing roosters for cockfights involves a traditional and strenuous method, requiring nearly four months of training and breeding leading up to the Sankranti festivities. The roosters undergo rigorous training, including a balanced diet of millets, cereals, dry fruits, and minced mutton to gain strength and weight. Training also includes swimming.

In response to the festival demand, rooster breeding farms have emerged in Godavari, NTR, and Krishna districts. These farms are managed under the supervision of veterinary experts, providing power training to develop agility in the roosters.

Certain breeds are in high demand, fetching prices ranging from ₹30,000 to ₹50,000.

> **Ahead of Sankranti festival season, Special Enforcement Bureau, NTR and Krishna district police are conducting special raids to curb manufacturing of rooster knives and prevent cockfights**
>
> A senior police official

Andhra Pradesh-IMA Chapter bags 10 nat'l awards for slew of achievements

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Vijayawada

ANDHRA Pradesh chapter of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) has bagged 10 awards for a slew of achievements in scientific, social, cultural, and sports activities in the past year. These awards will be conferred to the winners at the 98th IMA National Conference scheduled to be held in Thiruvananthapuram on December 27.

While Dr G Ravikrishna will be honoured with an award for best past president, Dr P Phanidhar has been recognised as the best State general secretary.

Dr M Ravindranath and Dr Tummala Karthik will also be receiving the awards for their efforts in organising the National Doctors Sports Meet. IMA Kakinada and Vijayawada secretaries Dr C Kiran and Dr PV Durga Rani, respectively, will be honoured with the awards under the Best Regional Secretary category.

Further, Dr Lakshmi Saujanya of Nandyala will be honoured for her dedication to promote sports among women. The Tirupati IMA branch has been recognised for its outstanding contribution to rural medical services. Dr Murali Mohan of Visakhapatnam and Dr Yugandhar of Tirupati will be presented with the National IMA President's Appreciation Award. IMA national vice-president Dr Srihari Rao, dean Dr Ramesh, IMA Andhra Pradesh president Dr M Jaya Chandra Naidu congratulated all the award winners.

EXPRESS READ

Seminar on 'Process of Innovation Development' held

Vijayawada: One should think about setting up start-up companies while they were students itself, said RVR and JC college of Engineering chairman Dr Rayapati Srinivas. He participated in the seminar on 'Process of Innovation Development' held by the college on Saturday. Meltronics Private Limited CEO, VSN Lokesh, attended as the chief guest and explained various stages and process of start ups. He suggested students to come out with technologies that will help the farmers to enhance the crop production

Deploy special team to execute long pending NBWs: SP

Ongole: Everyone should focus on the long pending Non-Bailable Warrants (NBW's) execution which should be considered as a serious issue. Don't be neglected in this regard, said Malika Garg, the District Superintendent of Police (SP). The SP conducted the Ongole Sub-division limits crime review with a special focus on the Non-Bailable Warrants (NBWs) here at the District Police Office (DPO) on Sunday. Speaking on the occasion, the SP directed the concerned officials to deploy special teams to execute all pending NBWs

NTR district gets new deputy commissioner of police for traffic

Vijayawada: Superintendent of police (SP) rank officer K Chakravarthi took charge as deputy commissioner of police (DCP) for traffic in Vijayawada on Sunday. Chakravarthi earlier served as superintendent of police for red sanders anti-smuggling task force in Tirupati. Chakravarthi recently posted as traffic deputy commissioner of police for NTR district. After taking charge, Chakravarthi also met NTR district commissioner of police (DGP) Kanthi Rana Tata and discussed various ongoing projects and works pertaining to traffic in the city

Second unit of UPAS Hospital inaugurated in Ongole

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Ongole

MAGUNTA Srinivasulu Reddy, Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha), commended UPAS Hospital for bringing a sophisticated corporate Heart Care Centre to Ongole, expressing gratitude for providing modern cardiac medical treatments.

He urged consideration for the less affluent, applauding the hospital's efforts. The MP, along with YSRC Party district president Janke Venkata Reddy, Ongole Mayor G Sujatha, TTD Board Member Siddha Sudheer Kumar, YSRCP Youth leader Balineni Praneeth, and others, inaugurated the UPAS Hospital's 2nd unit of the 'UPAS Heart Care Centre' in Santhapeta in Ongole on Sunday. MP praised affordable fees at the newly opened cardiac unit, emphasising its contribution to public healthcare.

Annual Day celebrations held on grand note at DPS

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Vijayawada

DELHI Public School (DPS), Vijayawada, celebrated its Annual Day on Saturday in a five-hour event on Sunday.

The event was graced by chief guest P Rajasekhar, Vice-Chancellor of Acharya Nagarjuna University, Guntur, and Guest of Honour Shekhar Chandra, Regional Officer, CBSE Vijayawada. P Rajasekhar emphasised the value of freedom in his speech, urging students to have the autonomy to pursue their future endeavors. Shekhar Chandra encouraged students to think innovatively.

Principal MS Buvaneswaran presented the School's Annual Report, highlighting achievements across various domains. Prizes for outstanding achievements in sports and cultural fields were distributed. K Suhas of class VI-C, a nationally acclaimed National level Badminton player, was awarded a cheque of ₹25,000 for winning the gold medal in the Nationals held in Hyderabad.

Walkathon held to raise awareness on sports event

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Guntur

A 2K Walkathon was organised from Police Parade Ground to Hindi College Centre to raise awareness on sports event, Aadudam Andhra, in Guntur on Sunday. Speaking on the occasion, Collector Venu Gopal Reddy said the State government will conduct the event to to identify and nurture the young talent at village level.

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy will launch Aadudam Andhra on December 26 in Guntur. Over 1.25 lakh people have enrolled to participate in five sports. This event will encourage the athletes by providing them with an opportunity to prove their talent, he added. Joint Collector Rajakumari, GMC Mayor Kavati Manohar Naidu, civic chief Kirthi Chekuri, corporators, and others were also present.

Guntur Collector and other officials taking part in 2K Walkathon on Sunday | EXPRESS

Meanwhile, Guntur SP Arif Hafeez inspected security arrangements for CM's visit and held a review meeting with officials here on Sunday. He said that all security measures should be taken at helipad, and at Loyola School in Nallapadu where the event will take place. He instructed the officials concerned to allot parking slots in prior. The officials should coordinate and deliver their assigned duties without fail to prevent any untoward incidents, he added. ASPs Srinivasa Rao, K Supraja, K Koteswara Rao, and other officials were also present.

Daily Starscope

PETER VIDAL

25TH December : Today is the ancient festival of the Unconquered Sun. And let us remember that for Christians it is the sacred birthday of Jesus Christ. From today, if we are in the north, then the amount of daylight each day begins to increase, and darkness decreases. Of course, if you live close to the equator there will be no change to see.

ARIES
(Mar 21 - Apr. 20)
You may be feeling slightly miffed at the behaviour of someone who appears to have little regard for your financial status or earnings, yet the continuing presence of Mars in your sign reveals that the time is fast approaching when you will be proved to have been right.

TAURUS
(Apr. 21 - May 21)
Concern about your emotional well-being may be aroused by secret worries. Yet under current planetary influences you've a golden opportunity to deal with any lingering problems and get into shape for the coming months. Venus, that most affectionate planet, is receiving plenty of support, so you should reach your goals.

GEMINI
(May 22 - June 21)
Pluto's continuing challenge to your sign is really quite wearing and, right now, there seems little doubt about the necessity for compromise, whether you want to or not. It may take a show of generosity to win you over. Partners have the best ideas, by the way, so sit back and listen.

CANCER
(June 22 - July 23)
Traditionally, Cancer is considered an artistic sign; yet all too often you have ignored creative aspirations that need to be expressed and talents that should be developed. Over the next fortnight why don't you look for ways to make up for all that lost time?

LEO
(July 24 - Aug. 23)
You learnt many years ago that life is not always easy, but that sometimes it's periods of stress which result in the greatest success and ultimately personal satisfaction and happiness. So don't let current problems disturb you any more than is necessary.

VIRGO
(Aug. 24 - Sept. 23)
Although you often adopt a high moral stance, in practice you are easily seduced into spreading gossip which may be baseless, or in harming other people's interests through ill-considered secret activities. Try to be more open and honest, and don't let rivals get under your skin.

LIBRA
(Sept. 24 - Oct. 23)
By now the situation in your second solar house reveals that your financial affairs could well be in a muddle, but if you're in a state of uncertainty this reflects the fact that there are a number of different options before you. Prof-essional adjustments should be nearing completion.

SCORPIO
(Oct. 24 - Nov. 22)
The winds of change are blowing through at least one major area of your life and you may be wondering where it will all end. The truth is that the current rash of alterations and adjustments should come to an end within a month. As soon as that happens, you'll be able to plan your next step.

SAGITTARIUS
(Nov. 23 - Dec. 22)
Much of what is going on behind the scenes will undoubtedly be to your benefit if only you would sit back and let certain events take their natural course. There may be a number of delays, but nothing you can't handle by calling on your creative skills.

CAPRICORN
(Dec. 23 - Jan. 20)
Social influences are definitely working in your favour, and if you're unhappy with the attitude or behaviour of someone with whom you're closely involved, why not take the bull by the horns, bring tensions to the surface and make certain that everyone is reassured.

AQUARIUS
(Jan. 21 - Feb. 19)
If you haven't already done so it's absolutely essential that you take practical and hard-headed decisions. Even though there may be one or two hold-ups today, you must press ahead with your original schedule. Try to cut down on financial costs before they spin out of control.

PISCES
(Feb. 20 - Mar 20)
Jupiter, your benevolent ruling planet, doesn't seem to know whether it wants to help you with your current plans or force you to take a different course altogether. The truth is, you must try and keep all the alternatives in mind. I know that's a tall order, but I also know that if anyone can do it, you can.

5	1				3	4	2	
3		2	5					
			6			5		3
6	5	3	8	9				4
	9						5	
7				5	4	9	3	6
8		1			5			
					9	7		8
	3	9	7				6	5

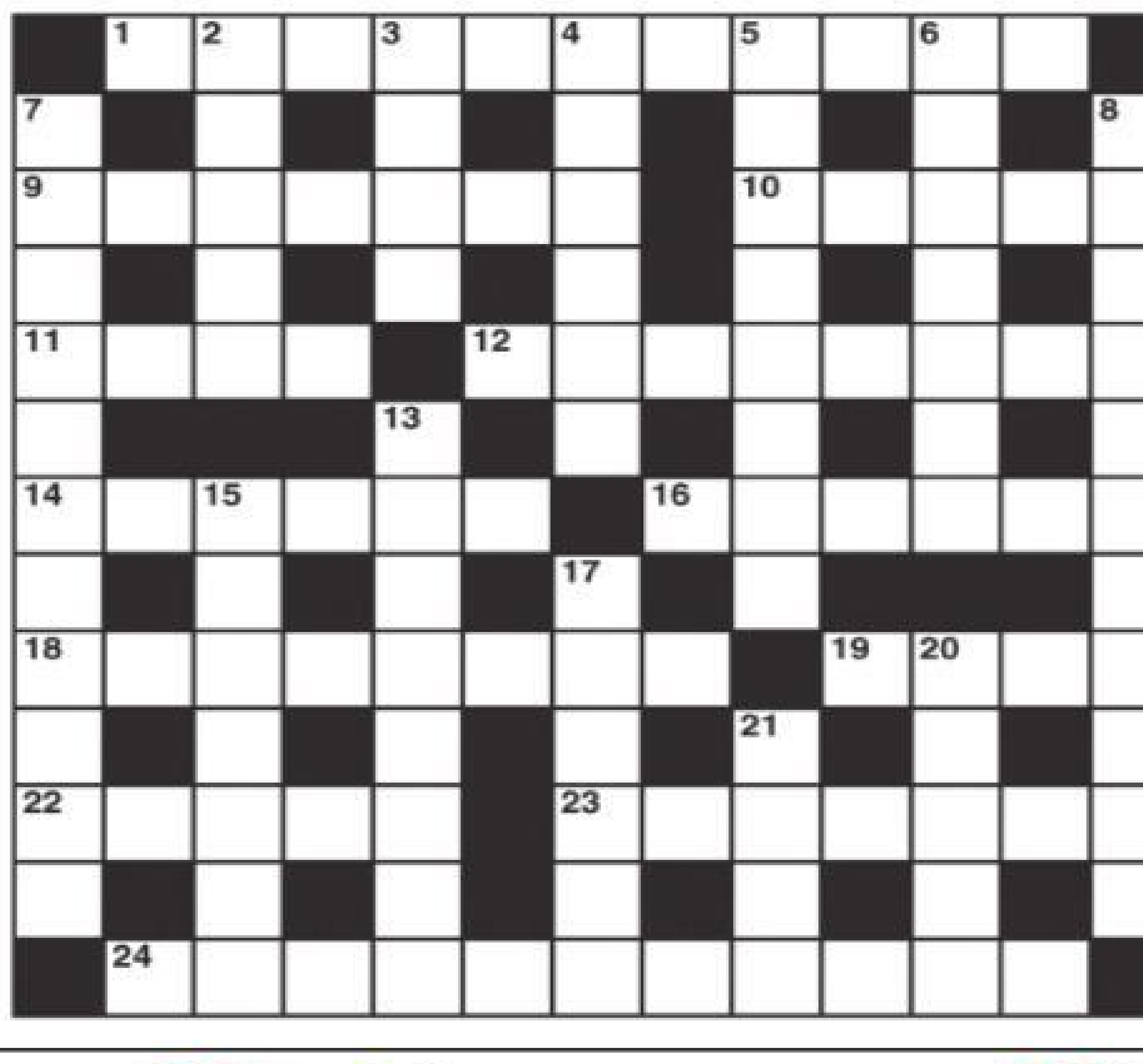
Solutions to Saturday's puzzle

8	4	7	3	1	2	9	5	6
2	9	1	5	6	8	4	3	7
6	5	3	4	7	9	1	8	2
9	3	4	8	2	7	5	6	1
7	2	6	9	5	1	8	4	3
1	8	5	6	4	3	7	2	9
3	1	8	2	9	4	6	7	5
5	7	2	1	8	6	3	9	4
4	6	9	7	3	5	2	1	8

SU DO KU EASY

TEST YOUR NUMBER CRUNCHING SKILL WITH OUR UNIQUE PUZZLE

Fill in the grid with digits in such a manner that every row, every column and every 3X3 box accommodates the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any.



CROSS WORD

ACROSS

1 Philanthropists throwing coins in the water? (4-7)
9 A support thus returned is appropriate (7)
10 A moss-strewn island of Greece (5)
11 Misfortunes we keep well away from (4)
12 Agreeable countryman about fifty (8)
14 Take some back to quarters (6)
16 Very much the opposite (6)
18 Agree to fight the case (8)
19 Prune spruce (4)
22 Find answer to love's torment (5)
23 Little Sarah always gets in a few (7)
24 Giveaway merchants who don't want custom? (4,7)

DOWN

2 Record membership (5)
3 They may part with a smile (4)
4 Offence committed in sunlit setting (6)
5 I can ship out from Spain (8)
6 Fierce sheep starts to breathe heavily (7)
7 For him it's mostly filling in time at work (11)
8 Mother sails out in signs of similar weather (11)
13 Fabric obtained for ready money only (8)
15 In France you change later for protection (7)
17 Cat lands us in more trouble (6)
20 Two kings embracing are not seen so often (5)
21 Keen to upset a singer (4)

SATURDAY'S SOLUTIONS

Across: 1 Action, 4 Idle talk, 9 Claire, 10 Ramparts, 12 Lips, 13 Cache, 14 Knee, 17 Disagreeable, 20 Mother tongue, 23 Ewer, 24 Amend, 25 Spur, 28 Tea chest, 29 Senior, 30 Radiance, 31 Stance.

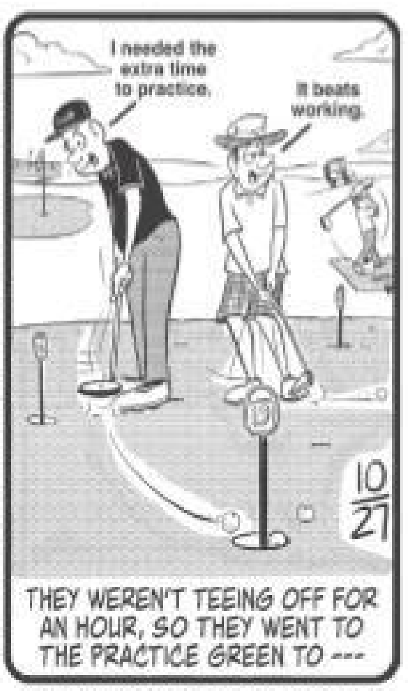
Down: 1 Accolade, 2 Trappist, 3 Oars, 5 Death warrant, 6 Espy, 7 Airing, 8 Kismet, 11 Face the music, 15 Igloo, 16 Allot, 18 Egyptian, 19 Pear tree, 21 Neuter, 22 Relaid, 26 Thea, 27 Next.

JUMBLE

BY DAVID L. HOYT
AND JEFF KNUREK

UNSCRAMBLE THESE JUMBLES, ONE LETTER TO EACH SQUARE, TO FORM FOUR ORDINARY WORDS.

TUBOA ☐○☐○☐○
PTAOD ☐○☐○○
RYNLUU ☐○○○☐☐
FWRUCE ☐○○☐○☐


I needed the extra time to practice.
It beats working.
10/21
THEY WEREN'T TEEING OFF FOR AN HOUR, SO THEY WENT TO THE PRACTICE GREEN TO ---

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Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

○○○○○○ ○○○○○○

(Answers tomorrow)

Saturday's Jumbles: LADLE NEEDY MORTAL INCOME
Answer: The patient who was being so rude to the hospital staff was — ILL-MANNERED

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

ANDHRA PRADESH

COVID TALLY Five new cases of Covid-19 were reported in the State, taking the total active caseload to 23 by 10 am on Sunday. Two of the individuals have co-morbidities & were admitted to a hospital

AP receives 4,337. 77 TMC in current water yr

In terms of outflows, 1,178.24 TMC was used for consumption, 1,089.25 TMC for irrigation, 55.4 TMC for other needs

S GURU SRIKANTH @ Vijayawada

THE first half of the current water year, spanning from June 1, 2023, to May 31, 2024, has witnessed a delayed monsoon, resulting in deficit rainfall. The inflows from upstream in various rivers flowing into the State have remained marginal at the best.

A real-time water audit conducted by the Andhra Pradesh Water Resources Information Management System (APWRIMS) has brought out some interesting facts.

According to the water audit, Andhra Pradesh has received a total of 4,337.77 TMC of water from various sources, with the majority sourced from rainfall between June 1 and December 24 of the current water year. Out of the outflow of 4,179.26 TMC, 1,178.24 TMC had been consumed by December 24, leaving only 158.51 TMC stored, including reservoirs, groundwater, and soil moisture.

The breakdown of the water inflows reveals that out of the total 4,337.77 TMC, 4,138.19 TMC comes from rainfall, while the remaining 199.58 TMC is attributed to inflows from other States. Among these, 182.67 TMC is alone from the Godavari River.

In terms of outflows, 1,178.24 TMC has been utilised for consumption, with 1,089.25 TMC for irrigation, 55.4 TMC for domestic purposes, and 33.58 TMC for industries. Evaporation losses accounted for 1,766.34 TMC, and surface and sub-surface outflows totalled 1,232.78 TMC.

Of the stored 158.51 TMC till December 24 from June 1 in the current water year, 223.12 TMC is retained as soil moisture, 9.89 TMC as groundwater, and 11.04 TMC in medium reservoirs.

However, 39.29 TMC was depleted from major reservoirs, and an additional 36.35 TMC was lost from minor irrigation tanks during this period.

Considering year-on-year figures, there has been a depletion of 353.71 TMC. As of December 24, the total water available in the State stands at 1,125.53 TMC, distributed across various forms.

Reservoirs hold 385.64 TMC, minor irrigation tanks (geo-tagged) have 101.19 TMC, soil moisture accounts for 628.17 TMC, and various water structures contain 10.52 TMC.

WATER AUDIT DATA BY APWRIMS

Head	Inflows (TMC)	Outflows (TMC)	Storage (TMC)
Water year	June 1, 2023	May 31, 2024	—
Total inflows	**4,337.77**	—	—
Rainfall	**4,138.19**	—	—
Other States' inflows	**199.58**	—	—
From Godavari	**182.67**	—	—
Total outflows	—	**4,179.26**	—

Herd of seven wild elephants stray onto rly tracks in Manyam, trains affected

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Parvathipuram-Manyam

SERVICES of a number of trains were disrupted after a herd of seven elephants strayed onto the railway track near Arthamvalasa village under Komarada mandal in Parvathipuram-Manyam district on Sunday.

Kurupam range forest officials reached the spot and sounded a high alert on the Visakhapatnam-Rayagada railway line after receiving information about the herd from locals. Subsequently, several trains were stopped at various railway stations in the region as the jumbos wandered on the track for a while.

Railway traffic on the line was resumed only after elephant trackers successfully moved the herd to the nearby hills in Arthamvalasa.

According to the sources, a herd consisting of eight elephants has been creating havoc by destroying standing crops such as paddy, banana, and sugarcane in various mandals under Parvathipuram-Manyam district for the past few months. One male adult elephant named Hari separated from the herd and ventured into Odisha territory in search of food, while the remaining seven jumbos ventured into Arthamvalasa.

Elephant monitoring cell in-charge officer, Manikanteswar said, "Now, the herd consisting of seven elephants has been traced on the outskirts of Arthamvalasa under Komarada mandal. The male tusker Hari ventured into Odisha territory in search of food. We have informed the railway officials regarding the movement of the elephants along the railway track. We have been continuously monitoring the movement of wild elephants."

Priests perform Chakra Snanam in connection with Swamy Pushkarini Theertha Mukkoti at Tirumala on Sunday | EXPRESS

70k have Uttara Dwara Darshanam at Tirumala

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Tirumala

OVER 70,000 devotees had Uttara Dwara Darshanam of Lord Venkateswara in Tirumala on Sunday. Vaikunta Dwadasi is also considered most auspicious after Vaikunta Ekadasi.

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) has made elaborate arrangements devotees to have a comfortable darshan.

Moving away from the earlier practice of only allowing Uttara Dwara Darshanam on Vaikunta Ekadasi, the TTD had extended it to Dwadasi a few years ago and later, it was further extended to 10 days to ensure more people to can have Vainkunta Dwara Darshan of the Lord.

The temple management deployed all the staff and deputation staff to welcome the devotees who have tokens and tickets of different types and send them in the queue. Utmost care was taken to ensure that there is no jostling.

TTD executive officer (EO) AV Dharma Reddy, who visited the Queue complex, greeted all the devotees. He also interacted with several people and spoke about issues related to tickets, tokens, entry issues, travel, food, water and other arrangements by TTD.

Chakra Snanam performed at Tirumala

In connection with Swamy Pushkarini Theertha Mukkoti, Chakra Snanam was observed with religious fervour on the auspicious day of Vaikuntha Dwadasi on Sunday. The Sudarshana Chakrattalwar was brought to Swamy Pushkarini and rendered holy dip amidst chanting of vedic mantras by Archakas during early hours and brought back to temple. It was observed in many TTD local temples in Tirupati on Sunday. It was observed in Sri Padmavati Ammavaru temple at Tiruchanoor, and other temples.

EXPRESS READ

Pulsus to set up European Business Tech Centre for farmers in AP

Vijayawada: A European Business Technology Centre will be set up with an aim to adopt European farming techniques and export goods, Pulsus Group CEO Gedela Srinubabu announced while speaking during the National Farmers' Day programme at Srikakulam on Sunday. He further explained that the Centre of Excellence (CoE) will incorporate drone technology and advanced farming techniques, including GPS-based field mapping and remote sensing to optimise crop yield and minimise environmental impact. The collaborative effort will involve a local university, and a research centre, he added

Artistes staging a play during the 22nd Nandi Natakotsavam in Guntur | EXPRESS

7 plays leave audience in awe on second day of Nandi Natakotsavam

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Guntur

DAY two of the 22nd Nandi Natakotsavam saw a number of theatre enthusiasts making a beeline to the Sri Venkateswara Vignan Mandir in Guntur on Sunday.

As many as seven plays, Sri Madhava Sarma, Badhyatha, Kalanetha, Cheekatipuvvu, Udham Singh, Trijudu, and Gamyasthanala Vaipu, were performed. Written by Rao Krishna Rao and directed by Goparaju Vijay, Gamyasthanala Vaipu focuses on how one should always strive to achieve their goals in life no matter what.

The struggles of protagonists Venkanna and Rambabu to overcome their problems, resonated with the youth and children in the audience.

The story of Goddess Kanaka Durga in the verse drama, Sri Madhava Sarma, impressed the audience.

Written by Amudala Subrahmanyam, Badhyatha—a children's play—stresses on the importance of protecting trees are filled the audience with a sense of responsibility. Kalanetha, a play written by Aakella, depicts the hardships of handloom weavers.

Andhra Pradesh State Film, Television, and Theatre Development Corporation (APSFTVTDC) managing director Tumma Vijay Kumar Reddy awarded prize money of ₹40,000 to Kalanetha, ₹25,000 to Badhyatha, ₹50,000 to Sri Madhava Sarma, ₹25,000 to Cheekati Puvvu play groups.

Backward Classes (BC) welfare Minister Ch Srinivasa Venugopala Krishna, along with Chairman of Andhra Pradesh State Film, TV, and Drama Development Corporation, Posani Krishna Murali, inaugurated the festival at Sri Venkateswara Vignan Mandir on Saturday.

Plays in 5 categories

A total of 38 drama societies from the State are expected to participate in five categories including poetic drama, social drama, social playlet, children's drama, and college or university drama

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THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

UNIVERSITY OF KERALA
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM-34

No. 18651/Advt-141/2023/PR

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

Invites Expression of Interest in sealed two-cover format (Technical & Financial) from registered and experienced architectural firms/ Project Management Consultants for KIIFB funded project, for the Thanu Padmanabhan Centre of Excellence in Astronomy and Astrophysics in between the Vice Chancellor's quarters and Campus Nursery school at Kariavattom campus. The building is to serve as the mainstay of the Centre with an Architecture laid in ergonomic design for the stakeholders involved in Research, Teaching, and Administration of the Centre. **Offers in sealed cover containing registration certificate and experience certificate should reach the undersigned not later than 10.30 am on or before 8th January 2024. Offers will be opened at 11.30 am on the same day.**

For more details visit 'Tenders' in www.keralauniversity.ac.in

Thiruvananthapuram Sd/-
20.12.2023 Registrar

BANARAS LOCOMOTIVE WORKS, VARANASI-221004

Bid No.: E-90/2023-24 Date: 22.12.2023

E-TENDERS

E-Tenders are invited for & on behalf of the President of India for the supply of following items. Only e-offer will be accepted for which vender must have Class III Digital Signature and registrations on IREPS. The details of tenders are in the following sequence S.No. - Tender No. (Due Date), Description and Quantity. **S.No.: 1.** 09221461B (08.01.2024), Cable Lug 0.5-10/M4CUVZn, to PL No. 29616402, 2421 Nos. **2.** 09231319A (12.01.2024), Developmental Tender for Extended ARC Chute ASM Kit, to PL No. 18140154, 06 Nos. **3.** 09231325A (12.01.2024), Developmental Tender for Current Sensor-1000A, to PL No. 18160025, 05 Nos. **4.** 09231077A (12.01.2024), Developmental Tender for Primary Voltage Transformer, to PL No. 29695028, 54 Nos. **5.** 09231089B (15.01.2024), Developmental Tender for Cable Tie 360 X 4.8 PA, to PL No. 29618710, 30000 Nos. **6.** 03231031 (04.01.2024), Set of Other Hoses, Part No. 29611519, Qty. 521 Set **7.** 03231423A (29.12.2023), Set of Fitting, Part No. 29610916, Qty. 499 Set **8.** 03231099D (15.01.2024), Developmental Tender of Sealing Rubber, Part No. 29250559, Qty. 30 Set **9.** 03231111C (15.01.2024), Developmental Tender of Set of Fitting, Part No. 29610916 , Qty. 30 Set **10.** 03231353C (12.01.2024), Developmental Tender of Set of Insulating Base, Part No. 29720977, Qty. 20 Set **11.** 01231238 (01.01.2024), Assembly Main Connecting Rod, PL No. 10030050, Qty. 8 Nos. **12.** 01231203 (12.01.2024), Counter Weight RB Rear, PL No. 16121340, Qty. 4 Nos., Counter Weight LB Rear, PL No. 16121363, Qty. 4 Nos. **13.** 04231203E Developmental Tender (15.01.2024), Fibre Glass Insulation Kit PL No. 29721167, Qty. 30 Sets **14.** 04231103A (16.01.2024), Panel Radiator to PL No. 11420236, Qty. 06 Nos. **15.** 04231034D (15.01.2024), Modified Striker Casting (Dev. Tender) PL No. 29130062, Qty. 20 Nos. **16.** 10221587B (11.01.2024), Kit of Turbo Dowelling Components, Part No. 16081110, Qty. 120 Nos. **17.** 06231247 (19.01.2024), Main Transformer 6531 Kva for WAG-9 loco specn no. CLW/ES/3/0456 Rev J or latest & STR No. CLW/C-D&D/STR/001 Rev. 0 or latest tank spec no. CLW/ES/3/0507 ALT NIL or latest conservator tank Spec. No. CLW/ES/3/0508 ALT NIL or latest & STR No. RDSO/2013/EL/STR/0079 Rev. 0 latest to PL No. 29731008 Qty. 310 Nos. The details of above tenders are available on **www.blw.indianrailways.gov.in** and **www.ireps.gov.in. CORRIGENDUM : Sl. No.: 18. Bid No.:** E-76, **Tender No.:** 09231317A, Transducer Tr MRPT to PL No. 18120349, Revision-1, **Existing due date :** 20.12.2023, **Revised due date:** 05.01.2024, **19. Bid No.:** E-77, **Tender No.:** 09231313A, Contractor AC 3 Pole 250A to PL No. 18140117, Revision-1, **Existing due date :** 18.12.2023, **Revised due date:** 08.01.2024, **20. Bid No.:** E-81, **Tender No.:** 09231208A, Contractor AC3 Pole 150A to PL No. 18140051, Revision-2, **Existing due date :** 22.12.2023, **Revised due date:** 08.01.2024, **21. Bid No.:** E-76, **Tender No.:** 09231315A, Ground Relay (GP) to PL No. 18180048, Revision-1, **Existing due date :** 15.12.2023, **Revised due date:** 10.01.2024, **22. Bid No.:** E-76, **Developmental Tender No.:** 10221196B, Piston Ring Set, Part No. 16030618, Revision-1, **Existing due date :** 15.12.2023, **Revised due date:** 29.12.2023, **23. Bid No.:** E-71, **Developmental Tender No.:** 10231045A, Lock Spring Seat, Part No. 16241629, Revision-2, **Existing due date :** 15.12.2023, **Revised due date:** 29.12.2023, **24. Bid No.:** E-84, **Tender No.:** 04231860, Revision-1, **Existing due date :** 21.12.2023, **Revised due date:** 26.12.2023, **Existing Qty.:** 43 Nos., **Revised Qty.:** 57 Nos. **NOTE:** All other terms and conditions will remain unchanged for above tenders.

PRO/BLW/S-97 PRINCIPAL CHIEF MATERIAL MANAGER

/blwvaranasi "Website : http://blw.indianrailways.gov.in"

CHANGE OF NAME

I, **SYEDA AMIRUNNISAA BEGUM** (OLD NAME) W/O. MIRANWAR HUSSAIN, R/O. D.NO.29/8, INUGUDURUPETA, MACHILIPATNAM, KRISHNA DIST,A.P, INDIA. I HAVE CHANGED MY NAME AS **SYEDDA AMEERUNNISA BEGUM** (NEW NAME). HERE AFTER MY NAME IS KNOWN AS **SYEDDA AMEERUNNISA BEGUM** FOR ALL PURPOSES.

UJVN LIMITED
H.O.: "UJJWAL", Maharani Bagh, GMS Road, Dehradun-248006,
Telephones.: 0135-2763808, Fax- 0135- 2763508,
CIN No. U40101UR2001SGC025866, Website: www.ujvnl.com

प.सं. 1266 Date Extension Notice-01 दि० 23.12.2023

It is to inform that due to unavoidable reasons invited bid of NIT No: 09/EE(E&M-SHP)/Madhyamaheshwar/2023-24 from the Office of Executive Engineer (E&M-SHP), Guptkashi is hereby extended as follows:

1. Last date for submission of bids online: 02.01.2024 upto 11:00 am
2. Last date for submission of bids in hard copy: 03.01.2024 upto 11:00 am
3. Date of opening of bids: 05.01.2024 at 12:30 pm

All other terms & conditions of the bid documents shall remain unchanged.

"Avoid wasteful use of Electricity" Executive Engineer (E&M-SHP)

Government of Tamil Nadu
Commissionerate of Stationery and Printing, Chennai-2

Cte.No.I-Election/35015/2023 TENDER NOTICE Dated:22.12.2023

For and on behalf of the Governor of Tamil Nadu, E-tenders are invited along with required samples for fixing rate contract for the purchase of Stationery articles, Corrugated plastic sheet Voting Compartments, Polythene Sheets and Polling Materials to Lok Sabha General Election 2024 from Manufacturers/Distributors and Authorized dealers and Sale of used P.S.Plates and Iron Scraps in Chennai and other Branch Presses as per the following groups.

Sl. No.	Groups & items		Tender Form can be accessed	Tender opening date and time
1	GROUP – I SL.NO 1 to 20 - 20 ITEMS	Purchase	From 25.12.2023 -11am To 29.01.2024-11am	30.01.2024 11.00 a.m.
2	GROUP – II SL.NO 1 to 7 - 7 ITEMS			
3	GROUP – III - SL.NO.1 to 4 – 4 Items.			
4	GROUP – IV to IX (Sale of Used P.S. Plates)	Sales		
5	GROUP – X – (Sale of Iron Scraps).			

Tender documents can be accessed from **https://tntenders.gov.in**

Chennai-2
Dated:22.12.2023 DIPR/6798/Tender/2023 **Commissioner.**

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IDFC FIRST Bank

NOTICE UNDER SECTION 13 (2) OF THE SECURITIZATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT, 2002

The following borrowers and co-borrowers availed the below mentioned secured loans from **IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC First Bank Limited)** The loans of the below-mentioned borrowers and co- borrowers have been secured by the mortgage of their respective properties. As they have failed to adhere to the terms and conditions of the respective loan agreements and had become irregular, their loan were classified as NPA as per the RBI guidelines. Amounts due by them to **IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC First Bank Limited)** are mentioned as per respective notices issued more particularly described in the following table and further interest on the said amounts shall also be applicable and the same will be charged as per contractual rate with effect from their respective dates.

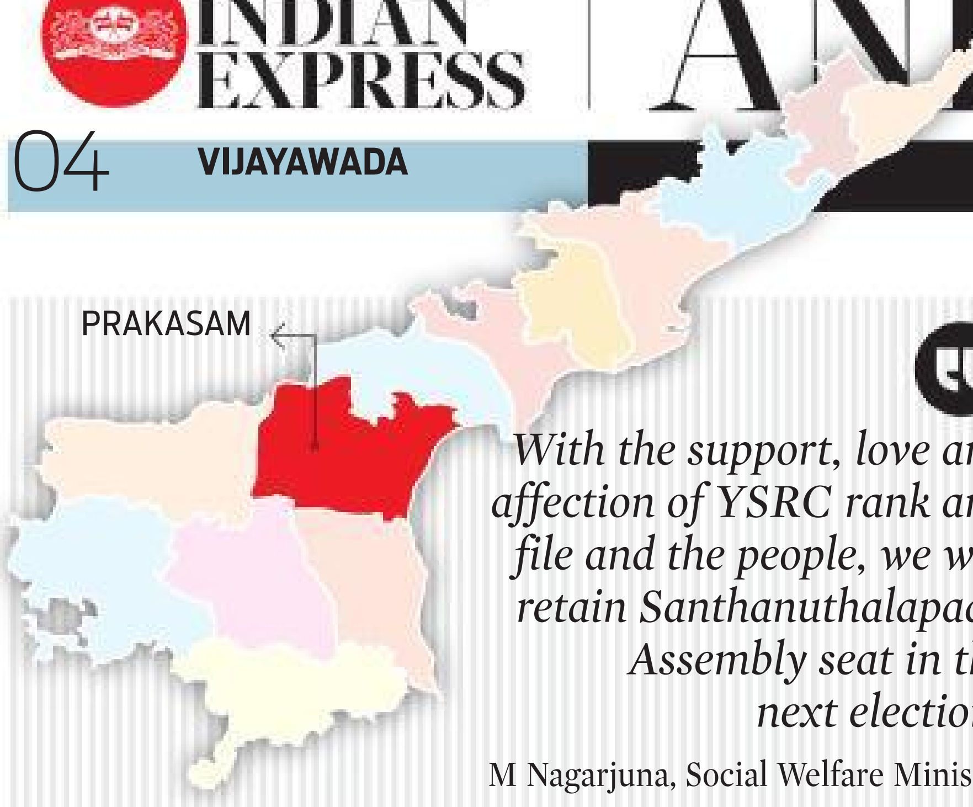
Sr No.	Loan Account No.	Type of Loan	Name of borrowers and co-borrowers	Section 13 (2) Notice Date	Outstanding amount as per Section 13 (2) Notice	Property Address
1	44613696	Loan Against Property	1. Moparti Rajasekhar 2. Moparti Vanajakshi	24.05.2023	INR 4,76,846.15/-	**Item-1:-** All That Piece And Parcel Of An Extent Of Acc House 96.67 Sq. Yds. Or 80.82 Sq. Mtrs. With Bearing D. No. 433-15 (as Per Tax Receipt Door No. 1-133, Assessment No. 1331) Of Gudavalli Grama Panchayathi, Cherukupalli Mandal, Guntur District, A.p. Situated In Jurisdiction Of Cherukupalli Sub-registry And Presently (regd. Link Partician Deed No. 146/2019 Property Registered At Cherukupalli Sro), Andhra Pradesh-522259, And Bounded As:- **East : Sarkar Bazar – 21 Feet, West : Sarkar Bazar – 21.6 Feet, North : House Site Of Moparti Venkatarao – 40.2 Feet, South : House Site Of Item-2 Property Of Moparthi Rajasekhar – 40.10 Feet** Within The Boundaries Of 96.67 Sq. Yds. Or 80.82 Sq. Mtrs. House Site And Also 21.6 X 25 = 540 Sq. Ft. Acc House. **Item 2:-** All That Piece And Parcel Of An Extent Of Acc House 96.67 Sq. Yds. Or 80.82 Sq. Mtrs. With Bearing D. No. 433-15 (as Per Tax Receipt Door No. 1-133, Assessment No. 1331) Of Gudavalli Grama Panchayathi, Cherukupalli Mandal, Guntur District, A.p. Situated In Jurisdiction Of Cherukupalli Sub-registry And Presently (regd. Link Partician Deed No. 147/2019 At Sro Cherukupalli), Andhra Pradesh-522259, And Bounded As: **East : Sarkar Bazar – 21 Feet, West : Sarkar Bazar – 21.6 Feet, North : House Site Of Item-1 Property Of Moparthi Rajasekhar – 40.10 Feet, South : Bapatla-vellaturu Hiway Road** Within The Boundaries Of 96.67 Sq. Yds. Or 80.82 Sq. Mtrs. House Site And Also 21.6 X 25 = 540 Sq. Ft. Acc House.

You are hereby called upon to pay the amounts to **IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC First Bank Limited)** as per the details shown in the above table with contracted rate of interest thereupon from their respective dates and other costs, charges etc., within 60 days from the date of this publication, failing which the undersigned shall be constrained to initiate proceedings, under Section 13 (4) and section 14 of the SARFAESI Act, against the mortgaged properties mentioned hereinabove to realize the amount due to **IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC First Bank Limited)** . Further you are prohibited under Section 13 (13) of the said Act from transferring the said secured assets either by way of sale/lease or otherwise.

Sd/-
Authorized Officer
IDFC First Bank Limited
(erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC First Bank Limited)

Date : 25.12.2023
Place : Guntur, Andhra Pradesh

VEHICLES SEIZED Police arrested four persons for stealing tractors and paddy bags at Muramanda village in East Godavari district on Sunday. Two tractors, two motorcycles and 50 paddy bags were seized from the quartet



With the support, love and affection of YSRC rank and file and the people, we will retain Santhanuthalapadu Assembly seat in the next elections

M Nagarjuna, Social Welfare Minister

New YSRC incharges step up campaign in Prakasam segments

IVNP PRASAD BABU @ Ongole

THE dissent over the recent shuffle of YSRC Assembly constituency coordinators/incharges by the party leadership seems to be subsiding slowly in the erstwhile undivided Prakasam district. The newly appointed coordinators have started coordinating with the YSRC party rank and file in their respective constituencies at the ground level to garner support.

Sitting Yerragondapalem MLA and Municipal Administration and Urban Development Minister Audimulapu Suresh has been shifted to Kondepi. Yerragondapalem is being held by the YSRC since the State bifurcation, and it is considered as Pulivendula of Prakasam district for the ruling party.

After shifting Suresh to Kondepi, the YSRC leadership has not appointed a new coordinator for Yerragondapalem. The YSRC party rank and file, which expressed dissent over shifting of Suresh to Kondepi, has been convinced now.

In Santhanuthalapadu, several YSRC leaders openly expressed their dissatisfaction over the party's unilateral decision of appointing Social Welfare Minister Merugu Nagarjuna, who is a non-local, as the Assembly constituency coordinator, replacing sitting MLA TJR Sudhakar Babu.

In Addanki, followers of former MLA Bachina Chenchu Garataiah, and his son and former incharge Bachina Krishna Chaitanya, had opposed the appointment of P Hanimi Reddy, stating that the party did injustice to the Bachina family. In spite of the dissent, the newly appointed coordinators have started going ahead to reach out to the people, besides coordinating with the party rank and file in a better manner to accomplish 'Mission 175' of YSRC chief and Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy.

Suresh has started coordinating with the YSRC rank and file in Kondepi to win their support. On the other hand, Nagarjuna, who met key YSRC leaders in Santhanuthalapadu, has exuded confidence of winning the Assembly seat in the next elections.

"Former Minister Balineni Srinivasa Reddy is our leader in Prakasam district. We all follow his directions and suggestions with due respect. With the support, love and affection of the party leaders, cadre and the public, we will definitely retain the Assembly seat in the next elections," averred Nagarjuna.

Hanimi Reddy, the new coordinator of Addanki, has also started his campaign in the constituency by coordinating with the party rank and file. "I am determined to serve Addanki constituency for the rest of my life. The YSRC will certainly win Addanki seat in the next elections with the coordinated efforts of the party rank and file," asserted Hanimi Reddy.

We will come up with more schemes: Jagan

Launches several development projects in Pulivendula Assembly constituency; reviews progress of PADA works

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Kadapa

KEEPING his Christmas tradition, Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy spent some quality time with leaders of his home constituency Pulivendula on Sunday. On the second day of his visit to YSR Kadapa district, he discussed several issues with the leaders of Pulivendula mandal. However, the focus of the meeting was to reach out to the people in a better manner, highlighting the welfare schemes and development programmes of the YSRC government in the last four-and-half years.

The Chief Minister took stock of the progress of various development works taken up by Pulivendula Area Development Authority (PADA). It has taken up several development works worth ₹36.03 crore, including a new police station in Simhadripuram mandal of the constituency.

He launched the ₹11.6 crore road widening and beautification works, the ₹5.5 crore YSR Park developed in 1.5 acres, the newly built police station worth ₹2 crore, tahsildar office costing ₹3.19 crore, ₹3.16 crore MPDO office, and other development works including the modernised Simhadri Junction. Jagan commenced his day by offering floral tributes to his father YS Rajasekhara Reddy at YSR Ghat in Idupulapaya. Thereafter, he participated in special Christmas prayers organised there, along with his mother YS Vijayamma, and wife YS Bharathi. A large number of people arrived at Idupulapaya to greet the Chief Minister.

Addressing a meeting of Pulivendula Assembly constituency leaders, Jagan explained how his government is progressing with a vision of development and welfare. "The people's acceptance and cooperation are paramount for the government to succeed in its development and welfare endeavours," he observed.

Jagan said he strongly believes that for a system to function effectively, transparency is vital and his government is strictly adhering to this principle. "People of the State are well aware of the efforts made by the YSRC government in the past four-and-a-half years to strengthen the public delivery system. The village and ward secretariat and the village volunteer system are crucial in it. In the future too, our government will strive to introduce more programmes and schemes for the betterment of people's lives and needs," he promised.

The local people made several requests and suggestions under the Jaganannaku Chebudam through Kadapa MP YS Avinash Reddy. A plea for a storage point at Mothunutanapalle and a new pipeline from Chitravati Balancing Reservoir was made as it would help irrigate several thousands of acres in the region.

Another request was made for the development of Gavesaraswamy temple in Mothunutanapallle as a tourist attraction. A cascading structure for Yerraballi tank was also proposed. Responding to their requests, Jagan asked them to submit the proposals to the officials concerned to take necessary action. Wishing Merry Christmas to all, Jagan concluded the meeting.

During the review of PADA development works, OSD Anil Kumar Reddy informed that the village administration has been strengthened. Agriculture and horticulture crops are being raised in 14,000 acres with water from minor irrigation sources. He made a PowerPoint presentation on development works taken up by PADA. Out of the total ₹44.40 crore allocated for various development works, ₹31.08 crore has been spent and several other works are in progress in the limits of PADA, he explained

YSR District Incharge Minister Audimulapu Suresh, District Collector V Vijaya Rama Raju and local people's representatives were present.

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy inaugurates the YSR Memorial Park at Simhadripuram in Kadapa district | EXPRESS

Be wary of Pawan: Jogaiah to Kapus

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Vijayawada

SENIOR leader and Kapu Samkshema Sena founder president Chegondi Harirama Jogaiah cautioned the Kapu community to be wary of Jana Sena Party chief Pawan Kalyan. The veteran leader, who is peeved over the JSP alliance with the TDP, made a scathing verbal attack on Pawan Kalyan in an open letter, released to the media on Sunday.

He said the prevailing political situation in the State is hurting him and has created a survival problem for the Kapu community, pushing it into self-defence mode.

"Till now all political parties have used Kapus and threw them out. However, Kapus are no longer ready to be used as pawns," he asserted.

Jogaiah said Pawan Kalyan was expected to lead Kapus to the forefront like Vangaveeti Mohana Ranga, but his alliance with the TDP had become an insult to the community. "Pawan Kalyan has pledged the self-respect of Kapus to TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu," he deplored.

The veteran leader said the Kapu community thought Pawan Kalyan would do something worthwhile for them, but going by the recent events, one is forced to wonder if the allegation of Pawan Kalyan being a 'package star' is true.

He further questioned how TDP general secretary Nara Lokesh could announce Naidu as the next Chief Minister if the TDP-JSP combine wins the ensuing elections, without consulting his ally? Would Lokesh make such a big announcement without the consent of Naidu? It all looks like a conspiracy of Naidu," he felt.

Jogaiah said there has been no response to his letters from either Pawan Kalyan or JSP Political Affairs Committee chairman Nadendla Manohar, hence it is time for Kapus to fight to get their share in power, he averred.

'Inscription of Vijayanagara era needs to be preserved'

Continued from page 1

The temple mentioned in the inscription is dedicated to Tiruvenngalanatha (Venkateswara), whose deity was not found in the sanctum sanctorum. Interestingly an image of Veerabhadra in standing posture was seen. According to Dr Reddy, the inscription also refers to Timmarusu, the Prime Minister of Sri Krishnadevaraya, as the overlord of the region.

"We could reach the spot where the inscription was found after a tedious journey in the hilly terrain followed by a steep valley in the forest. We sensitised the villagers on the historical significance of the inscription and the need to shift it to Koppunuru village. We also stressed on the need to erect it on a pedastal with historical signage to preserve it for posterity," he explained.

People will not forgive Jagan: Naidu

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Vijayawada

TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu has said the people of Andhra Pradesh will not forgive Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy for his 'oppressive' and 'anarchic regime'.

Addressing a meeting organised at the TDP headquarters in Mangalagiri on Sunday to welcome several leaders into the party fold, Naidu observed, "Political migrations have started in Andhra Pradesh, and Jagan too has realised that his 'cinema (show)' is coming to an end." On the occasion, the TDP supremo mocked Jagan for changing the sitting YSRC MLAs when the people have already decided to change him. "He says, he will go to Visakahaptnam in three months, but is conveniently ignores the fact that he will go home after three months," Naidu remarked.

Alleging that the sand mafia was ruling the roost in the State, the TDP chief accused Pedakurapadu MLA of leading it in two districts.

"Cases under various Acts are being registered against those who are confronting the YSRC government for its failure to deliver goods. Do we really need this kind of Chief Minister?" he asked.

Asserting that not a single section of people are happy under Jagan's 'misrule', Naidu said this all could be changed, if all sections of the society are firm in their resolve to see the change. At the same time, he promised to put the derailed State economy on the path of progress.

Naidu said he performed Sudarsana and Narasimha Yagas, in the past three days only for the welfare of the people, and stated that power is not new for him and no leader can break his record. Listing out various failures of the YS Jagan Mohan Reddy government, he deplored that land encroachments and crimes against all sections of people had increased significantly in the last four-and-a-half years.

Stressing that a leaders should have credibility, Naidu said this is one thing Jagan lacks the most.

"Jagan said he would not seek votes from people, if he failed to implement total prohibition in a phased manner. But now, though he failed to keep his promise, he has already started seeking votes," Naidu pointed out.

Naidu reiterated that the coming elections are not for him or for the Jana Sena Party, but they are for the welfare of five crore people of Andhra Pradesh, and urged the people to take a correct decision for their guaranteed future.

Several YSRC leaders from Tanuku, Pedakurapadu, Amalapuram, Gajapathinagaram and other Assembly segments joined the TDP on the occasion.

TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu welcomes several YSRC leaders into the party fold at the party headquarters in Mangalagiri on Sunday | EXPRESS

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy is time and again saying that he will go to Vizag in three months, but he is conveniently ignoring the fact that he will go home after three months

N Chandrababu Naidu, TDP supremo

Governor S Abdul Nazeer takes part in the Semi-Christmas celebrations at the Raj Bhavan in Vijayawada on Sunday | EXPRESS

Love is the only path to peace: Guv

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Vijayawada

GOVERNOR S Abdul Nazeer participated in the Semi-Christmas celebrations held at Durbar Hall in the Raj Bhavan here on Sunday.

Speaking on the occasion, the Governor said, "Jesus Christ gave the mankind, the message of peace, harmony and universal brotherhood, and this is what all of us need to practise in our lives. To be truly happy, we must rise above bigotry and jealous of others, and we must love even those who hate us, and love is the only path to peace, freedom and happiness."

The programme commenced with Bishop Sampath reciting prayers and Bible reading, followed by Christmas message by Bishop Ebenezer, Metropolitan Mission, Vijayawada.

Daniel, vice-chairman of AP Minorities Commission, felicitated the Governor. After cake cutting, closing prayers and Benediction was delivered by Bishop George Cornelius, CSI Vijayawada. Officials and staff of Raj Bhavan attended the programme.

Children without cots and proper bedsheets and blankets sleep in a government BC Welfare Hostel in Kurnool City | EXPRESS

DLSA to submit report on deficiencies to HC

Continued from page 1

Officer of a BC welfare-run DNT (De-notified tribal) hostel in B-Camp, Kurnool, A Maha Lakshmi revealed that they have not received bed sheets. "Normally, the winter essentials arrive by July-end. However, this year, the delivery has been delayed," she explained.

Speaking to *TNIE*, the district BC Welfare Officer (district empowerment officer), P Venkata Lakshmamma, maintained that they have dispatched the bedsheets and blankets. She said some hostel welfare officers were not collecting their stock promptly, leading to delays in distribution. She added that she will issue strict instructions to all officers concerned to ensure every child receives the essentials promptly.

Numerous issues at the hostels came to light during an inspection by Kurnool District Legal Service Authority (DLSA) secretary and senior civil judge Ch Venkata Naga Srinivasa Rao, along with District Child Protection Officer T Sarada.

For instance, a BC Welfare Department-run hostel in Peddapadu village lacked sufficient bathrooms and toilets, causing inconvenience to the 250 students who were residing there. Another hostel, managed by the SC Welfare Department, did not have adequate rooms and toilets. Shockingly, 70 per cent of the hostel buildings exhibit poor conditions, including issues with window and bathroom doors, and inadequate water facilities.

The DLSA secretary said a detailed report on the deficiencies identified at the hostels during the inspection will be submitted to the High Court of Andhra Pradesh.

We have dispatched bedsheets and blankets to all hostels. Some hostel welfare officers are not collecting their stock promptly. Strict instructions will be given to all to ensure every child gets essentials

P Venkata Lakshmamma, BC Welfare Officer

EXPRESS READ

Peddireddy inaugurates 3 power substations

Tirupati: Minister for Energy Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy inaugurated several development works in Chowdepalle village of Punganur mandal in Chittoor district on Sunday. Peddireddy inaugurated three power substations at Kondamarri, Billeru and Durgasamudram villages of Chowdepalle mandal. Speaking on the occasion, the minister said Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has been supporting him in developing Punganur Assembly constituency on all fronts.

Spike in Covid cases casts shadow on tourism sector

Social media spread panic among tourists with alarmist reports

SHAINU MOHAN @T'Puram

THE resurgence of the new Covid-19 variant is casting a shadow on the booming tourism industry in Kerala.

The news of Covid-related deaths and the growing number of cases have spread like wildfire on social media platforms, triggering panic among tourists. While the tourism season is in full swing, the stakeholders are concerned about the reports on Covid that portray Kerala as the hot spot of the new variant in the country.

The Centre has also sounded high alert for Kerala and has given direction to all the states to scale up testing for Covid-19. According to the stakeholders, the industry receives a high number of bookings in December and January. Indian Association of Tour Operators vice-president E M Najeeb told TNIE that the tour operators are bombarded with calls from tourists during this time.

"We met the tourism secretary and apprised him of our concern. The news about Covid that is coming out is bad for the industry and we have demanded not to highlight the disease so much. As of now, the situation is under control. But if the cases rise, the industry will feel the heat," said Najeeb. He blamed the media coverage and news on social media for the rising apprehension and anxiety among the tourists. "We have only a few international tourists now and a large share of the visitors are from other states. Anticipated precautions will not affect the industry much," he added. Industry insiders are worried about the trend as the previous Nipah outbreak also negatively impacted the industry. Kerala State Homestay and Tourism Society secretary M P Sivadathan said the homestay owners are very apprehensive about the situation.

"Last year also we survived on domestic tourism. The inflow of foreign tourists is yet to pick up and we have done so much campaigning in north India and other states to bring in domestic tourists. And we are getting bookings like never before. But after the news of the new variant of Covid-19, we are getting anxious calls from our clients. Although negligible in number, there have been cancellations too," said Sivadathan. He said the tourism industry had struggled to stay afloat during the pandemic.

"Things were going good. However, the new outbreak of Covid has left us all concerned," he said.The booming MICE Tourism is also under threat in the state. Raju Kannampuzha of Executive Events said "We are getting queries from clients checking on the Covid situation in the state. Our company conducted six events and two major events are being scheduled for January. As of now, there is no problem. However, even minor issues are being highlighted and circulated on social media," said Raju.

Hanuman devotees raise slogans outside mosque

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Mandya A

SEA of devotees clad in saffron robes gathered near Jama Masjid also known as Masjid e-Ala at Srirangapatna Fort built by Tipu Sultan chanting 'Jai Shree Ram' on Sunday morning.

The devotees who c?me from various parts of the state were participating in the Hanuma Sankeerthana Yatre which was organised by Hindu Jagarana Vedike. The Hunuma Maladharis took out Sankeerthana Yatra from Sri Kshanambhika Temple to Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple. The yatra was led by RSS leader Kalladka Prabhakar Bhat. During the yatra, the devotees holding the flag of Sri Rama and Hanuma shouted slogans that they will build the Sri Anjaneya Temple in the place of the Jama Masjid.

The district police led by SP N Yatish had arranged a elaborate police bandobast to prevent any untoward incident during the yatra at the place. The police had barricaded the Jama Masjid and deployed hundreds of policemen and KSRP platoons at the venue. Meanwhile, before the launch of the yatra, RSS leader Kalladka Prabhakar Bhat while addressing the devotees at the premises of the Moodalabagilu Anjaneya Temple said that hijab clad girl Muskhan from Mandya has links with Islamist militant organisation Al-Qaeda. "Al-Qaeda has given money and support to Mandya girl Muskhan. She has contact with the terror organisation.

So the people should be alert and careful as terrorists will be coming to Mandya and there will be terror attacks" he said. Slamming the state government for its decision to withdraw the hijab ban order, Bhat said that if Muslim girls are allowed to wear hijab, then Hindu students will wear saffron shawls and caps to the classes. "If Muslim students chant Allahu Akbar, then Hindus will chant Jai Sri Ram. If the government has guts, it can stop Hindu students from chanting Jai Sri Ram. Students wear uniforms to prevent discrimination. Let Muskhan chant Allahu Akbar in her house or at Masjid. She can even go to Islamic state.

She had to chant Ram here. By withdrawing the ban on hijab, Congress is sowing the seed of discrimination among children," he said. Appealing to the devotees to watch 'The Kerala Story' and 'Kashmir Files' to know the true facts of religious conversions happening in the country, Bhat said that it is not just Muslim men but women are also on the mission to cheat Hindu girls.

"Attempts for Love Jihad for conversion are happening in the country. Why should Muslim men target Hindu girls? Conversions are happening in Masjids. It was PM Modi who banned triple talaq and ensured 'permanent' husbands for Muslim women. Congress is responsible for the death of Captain MV Pranjal. Former PM Manmohan Singh had said that Muslims must have first claim on resources, while CM Siddaramaiah has reserved Rs 10,000 crore for Muslims.

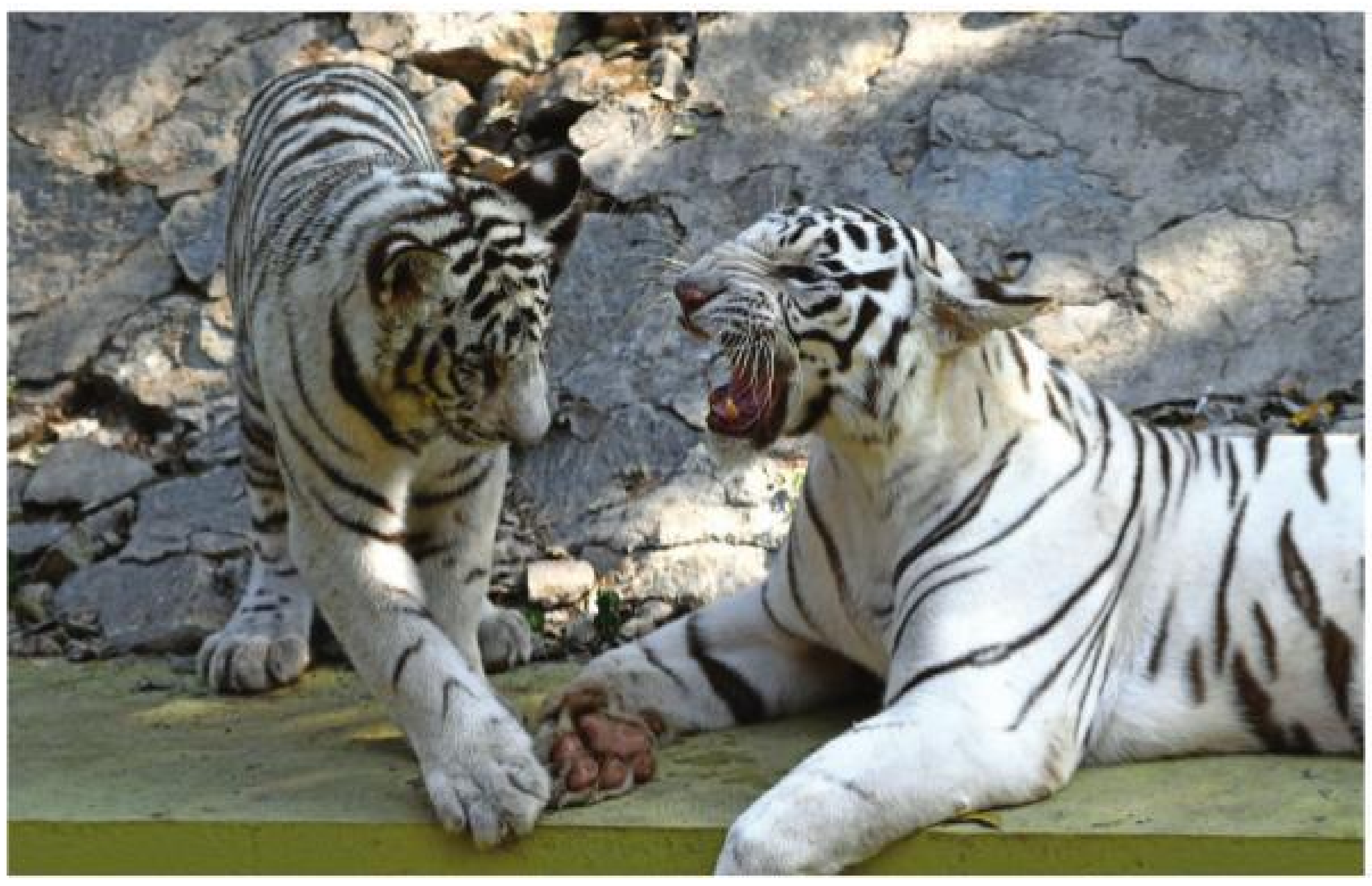
The taxes paid by Hindus are being utilised by Muslims," he said. Stating that BR Ambedkar opposed the partition of India, Bhat said that Hindus have the responsibility to save the country.

"While Muslims have several countries, Hindus have only Bharat. They have no other place to go," he said.

Hindu couples must have three children Bhat said that Hindus must give birth to three children to protect the country from becoming Islamic country.

"Hindus couples should not have just one child, but at least have three kids as the population of Muslims is increasing in the country. They shouted zindabad for Kasab and thought only in favor of Pakistan. Hundreds of Muslim rulers have attacked India and tried to convert it into Islamic country," he said.

Karnataka State Brahmin Development Board director Banuprakash Sharma and Hindu Jagarana Vedike leader Kumaraswamy were present.



FRIENDLY FIGHT

White tiger cubs seen in a playful mood in their enclosure at Nehru Zoological Park in Hyderabad | **VINAY MADAPU**

Fake vehicle owners cheat people, held

ENS @ Hyderabad

CYBERABAD police arrested three persons for cheating people in the guise of selling vehicles at lower prices. The accused reportedly impersonated the general managers of Mahindra Automotive Limited and lured victims to transfer money to them.

The case came to light when a Hyderabad-based man, who is involved in providing security services, lodged a complaint at the Cyber crime police station. The complainant said that he received a call from an unknown person, who identified himself as G S Chandrasekhar and claimed to be the general manager at Mahindra CIE Automotive Limited.

The accused informed him that he was a former client of the complainant's security services and informed him that they needed security at a new factory in Chittoor. Following the conversation, the complainant shared a quotation with the accused and confirmed that security services would be needed on January 25, 2024.

Meanwhile, the accused informed the complainant of a purported annual auction at the Mahindra CIE Automotive Ltd. Chandrasekhar told the complainant that he could purchase brand new R&D and demo vehicles at a discount. Trusting this, he proceeded to book two Mahindra Bolero SLX vehicles and transferred a total sum of ₹3.54 lakh to the bank accounts of the accused. However, when he tried to contact Chandrasekhar, the victim realised that the mobile number was switched off.

45 Tamil books being translated in other languages

SUBASHINI VIJAYAKUMAR
@ Chennai

THE state government has so far sanctioned 45 outward grants to translate Tamil literature into more than 25 languages. This includes translation of Tamil literature that comes under Pathupaatu in Malay language and also a comic version of Ponniyin Selvan in Italian. According to officials, more than 350 MoUs for inward and outward translations were signed during last year's Chennai International Book Fair.

While 45 outward grants have been sanctioned, more than 50 are under scrutiny and another 12 have been kept in the waiting list. \"We aim to translate 100 books through these MoUs. Those countries whose paperwork is complete and have begun translation work are now designing the wrappers and synopsis. We plan to bring out a booklet featuring these books to be translated including the wrapper in the target language and synopsis in Tamil,\" said an official from Tamil Nadu Textbook and Educational Services Corporation. The state government this year increased the translation grant to Rs 3 crore from 1.5 crore last year to aid the efforts in taking Tamil literature to the world. Apart from this, publishers have also been encouraged to apply for translation grants that are given by various countries. So far, publishers have got six to seven inward translation grants from different countries, added officials.More than 40 countries are expected to participate in the CIBF. While the first edition saw the participation of 25 countries that were mainly represented by their respective consulates, publishers, authours, and literary agents will be participating this year. \"This is mainly due to the impact of CIBF stall at the Frankfurt Book Fair where our team met several publishers and authours. We will have participants representing all continents this time. This will include USA, Canada, Brazil, France, Spain, Germany, UK, Lithuania, Albania, Senegal, Tanzania, New Zealand, and Asian countries including Malaysia, Indonesia, Russia and Turkey. In addition, the U.S Consulate has also approached us to organise a book release event,\" added the official.To bridge the communication gap between international and Tamil publishers last time, the directorate of public libraries also trained 20 literary agents from the state who will be part of the event this year, to ensure smooth and effective communication. The Government-Certified Global Literary Agents Programme is a pioneering initiative aimed at elevating the state's literary presence in the global arena.

EXPRESS READ

₹18 lakh stolen from SBI ATM in Chikballapur

Chikballapur: Miscreants open an ATM by using a gas cutter and decamp with huge amount of cash at busy MG Road of Chikballapur on Saturday night. Sources said that in view of Christmas holidays the SBI bank officials loaded huge cash into the ATM machine. It is learnt that the miscreants stole about ₹18 lakh.

TS voters set to exercise franchise in AP too?

S BACHAN JEET SINGH @ Hyderabad

WITH elections to Assembly and Lok Sabha being round the corner in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh, the voters with dual voter cards in the two Telugu states are getting ready to vote in the upcoming elections.

A few thousand voters who exercised their franchise in the recently concluded Telangana Assembly elections are said to be getting ready to go to Andhra Pradesh as they are also registered voters there to vote.

Meanwhile, hectic activity has been observed as hundreds of residents from AP who are residing in Hyderabad and peripheral areas of the city are making efforts to get enrolled as voters in Andhra Pradesh too.

However, the Election Commission of India (ECI) clearly states that a voter can enrol for the first time as a voter by submitting Form 6 to ERO.

In case of shifting from one place to another, Form 8 has to be submitted to the ERO concerned to effect changes in electoral rolls. The ECI has directed district collectors in Andhra Pradesh to scrutinise new voter applications for duplicate votes. It emphasised that no person can be registered as a voter in two places or states.

"A person cannot be enrolled as a voter at more than one place given the provisions contained in Sections 17 and 18 of Representation of the People Act, 1950. Likewise, no person can be enrolled as an elector more than once in any electoral roll. if anyone violates this rule, he is liable to be punished under Section 31 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950. The punishment may extend to one-year imprisonment or fine or both," election authorities told TNIE.

Further, they stated that the main criteria for enrolling a voter is based on his domicile and place of ordinary residence. The place of ordinary residence is the place where he sleeps at night. Already the ruling YSRCP and opposition TDP in Andhra Pradesh have lodged complaints with the ECI accusing each other of promoting bogus and dual votes in AP.

Both political parties want the ECI to intervene and remove the bogus and dual votes. The directive comes after a complaint by the YSRCP regarding individuals registered as voters in Telangana as well as in AP.

They alleged that lakhs of bogus voters were enrolled and more are expected to get enrolled before the AP polls. They also cited examples of people living in neighbouring states who are enrolled as voters in AP. The complaints come close on the heels of the ECI warning people against enrolment of bogus votes. It also warned of action if people, who reside outside the state, enrol as voters in AP even though they have voting rights in the state of their residence.

Even as a voter ID-Aadhaar card linkage is on to weed out "double voters" across the country, very few of the voters got this done so far. The Central government meanwhile, extended the date for this linkage by a few more months. Sources also said that a few thousand software engineers from Telangana working in Bengaluru too had dual votes, many of them voted both in Karnataka and Telangana Assembly polls that were held this year.

ACT OF KINDNESS

Fighting hunger, odds, railway staffer turns saviour of passengers

EXPRESS ILLUSTRATION

B ANBUSELVAN @ Chennai

SOUTHERN Railway has honored A Jawber Ali, the Station Superintendent of Srivaikuntam railway station, and K Selvakumar, the Track Maintainer, with a cash award of ₹5000 each for their exceptional efforts during the recent rains.

Ali worked tirelessly for 54 hours without food managing the station and around 500 stranded passengers for nearly three days. Selvakumar timely alert informing the washing away of railway tracks in Srivaikuntam - Seydunganallur section during heavy floods on December 17 in the Tiruchendur - Tirunelveli section prevented the potential mishap. There were 800 passengers onboard when the Chennai bound Chendur express was halted at Srivaikuntam on December 17.Additionally, 12 other railway employees who served during intense rains were each rewarded Rs. 2500, said an official order issued by zonal railway on Friday.

The 54-year-old station superintendent Ali patiently managed over 500 irate passengers stranded in the train for more than 36 hours without food. The officer's cabin was constantly crowded with people demanding milk and food for children and the elderly every 10 to 15 minutes from 8 am on December 18, he recalled.

Besides answering the passengers amid heavy floods, the officer had to coordinate with railway officers using the railway phone, the only available network for communicating with outsiders. While 300 passengers were relocated to a relief centre at a nearby school at 1.30 am on December 18, the remaining 500 stranded on the train without food till 10 am, December 19.

Station superintendent keeps cool in trying times

54-year-old station superintendent Jawber Ali patiently managed over 500 irate passengers stranded in the train for more than 36 hours without food. The officer's cabin was constantly crowded with people demanding milk and food for children.

As many as seven pairs of trains traverse through the Srivaikuntam station in the Tiruchendur - Tirunelveli section and it was not equipped to accommodate such a large volume of passengers. The station superintendent who I logged into the office at 1.30 pm on December 17 left the station at 6.30 pm on December 19.

Track maintainer Selvakumar, during heavy rains on December 17 walked through the track between Srivaikuntam and Seydunganallur spotted the track and concrete sleepers were hanging with rainwater flowing beneath them. The earthen formation and ballasts, which form the track, were washed away in multiple locations. He immediately alerted the sectional engineer resulting in the cancellation of the train.

The station superintendent told TNIE that the challenging part of the crisis was that everyone needs help, but none in a position is to help. "A section of passengers was petrified after attempts to shift them to a nearby relief center during midnight failed due to a high level of water flow on the road bridge.

As food did not arrive on December 18, passengers became impatient, and many were anxious about their returns. There was no power on the train. Due to sleep deprivation and anxiety, many started walking on the track carrying luggage immediately after the rainwater slightly receded,"The notice from the sectional engineer to halt the Chendur Express was received at 9.12 pm on December 17, while the train had left Nazareth station for Srivaikuntam at 9 pm. Srivaikuntam was reached by 9.20 pm, and the official cancellation occurred at 11 pm.

"If the call had been received two minutes earlier, the train could have been halted at Nazareth, which has ample facilities to accommodate stranded passengers." said Ali.

The other 12 railway staff who were awarded a ₹2500 cash reward are M Sankara Nainar, U Sasikumar, I Abraham, Shijo Thomas, Shaju, A Ayyasamy, S Sunder, K Meenakshi Sundaram, S Elamaran, J Wilson Peter, Vinit Kumar, and S Ravikumar. They served in various roles such as pointsman, loco pilot, TTE, mechanic, and other positions.

EDITORIAL

"Some people go to priests, others to poetry

Virginia Woolf

INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.

— **Ramnath Goenka**

WIN THE CONFIDENCE OF LOCALS TO CONTAIN MILITANCY IN J&K

THE December 21 terrorist attack on an Army convoy in Jammu & Kashmir's Poonch, in which five soldiers lost their lives, bares the chinks in the intelligence apparatus. Following the deadly ambush, the security forces picked up eight locals for questioning but three of them were later found dead, triggering a massive outrage in their villages. That the killed civilians were tribal Gujjar men further complicated matters. Meanwhile, the hunt for the militants involved in the attack is on and mobile Internet services continue to be suspended in Poonch and Rajouri districts.

The rising number of military casualties is a big worry for the forces. Since 2021, the Army has lost 33 personnel in Rajouri and Poonch districts. There have been 251 terrorist-initiated incidents in J&K between 2021 and May this year. In November 2023, four Army personnel including two Captains were martyred in Rajouri district. In September, two Army officers of the rank of Major and Captain, and a police officer of DySP rank were killed in action in the forests of Kokernag near Anantnag. In April, five soldiers lost their lives in a militant attack in Pir Panjal Valley in Pooch district.

While militancy has been on a downward trend in J&K post the abrogation of Article 370 in August, 2019, security forces have suffered casualties, particularly in Poonch and Rajouri districts, which fall in the Pir Panjal region and are close to the Line of Control. A heavily forested area, marked with difficult terrain, militants find it easy to hide, target convoys and security personnel before escaping to the other side, of Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir.

Most of these militants have not fallen under the radar of security personnel. While local militant recruitment has witnessed a decline, the number of foreign and hybrid (those not identified) recruits has gone up. The main reason why these terrorists remain undetected is due to the 'drying of Intelligence' at the village level. Fencing of forests for conservation purposes has reportedly restricted the movement of tribals who have families in the PoK. Earlier, they would keep a watch and report suspicious movements to the security forces. But with restrictions and a feeling of disenchantment with the administration, local intelligence is drying up.

To address this, the administration and security forces need to involve confidence-building measures, especially with the tribals in the Pir Panjal area, to counter the scourge of cross-border militancy supported by Pakistan's deep state. Nothing works better than human intelligence.

SENIOR PARTY LEADERS' CONVICTION BLOW TO DMK

The Madras High Court's verdict convicting senior DMK leader K Ponmudy and his wife P Visalakshi in a disproportionate assets case has come as a sharp blow to the ruling party in Tamil Nadu. Ponmudy, a party veteran, was holding the key portfolio of higher education till the verdict resulted in his disqualification from the legislative assembly. The leader's political career now rests in the hands of the Supreme Court.

The case against Ponmudy was registered in 2011 after the AIADMK came to power in the state. He was accused of amassing wealth disproportionate to known sources of income with his wife's abetment. The trial court acquitted the couple by considering them as separate entities who cannot be "clubbed together". The HC, however, found this view flawed and a miscarriage of justice, stating that the trial court had failed to appreciate that the charge against Visalakshi was of abetment by holding Ponmudy's assets that he had acquired through unknown sources. The HC pointed out that trial court had accepted the income tax statements of Visalakshi as sufficient evidence for her income from various companies without examining how that income was accrued. Similarly, it had failed to accept the valuations of her agricultural income as provided by government officials, relying on her "self-serving" tax statements instead. The court sentenced the couple to three years simple imprisonment and a ₹50 lakh fine each, allowing them a month's time to surrender. The likelihood of the SC providing relief for Ponmudy appears slim.

The HC's verdict has left Ponmudy the second DMK minister to lose his portfolio in recent months, the first being V Senthil Balaji who is under investigation in a jobs scam. Others, including Ponmudy, are under enforcement directorate scrutiny as well. The development puts the party on the back foot, especially in the run-up to the general elections next year, leaving it open to opposition accusations of corruption. Three years into government, the DMK already faces the possibility of an anti-incumbency mood from the electorate. Only good and responsive governance can be a remedy.

QUICK TAKE

END CHILD MARRIAGE WITH INCENTIVES

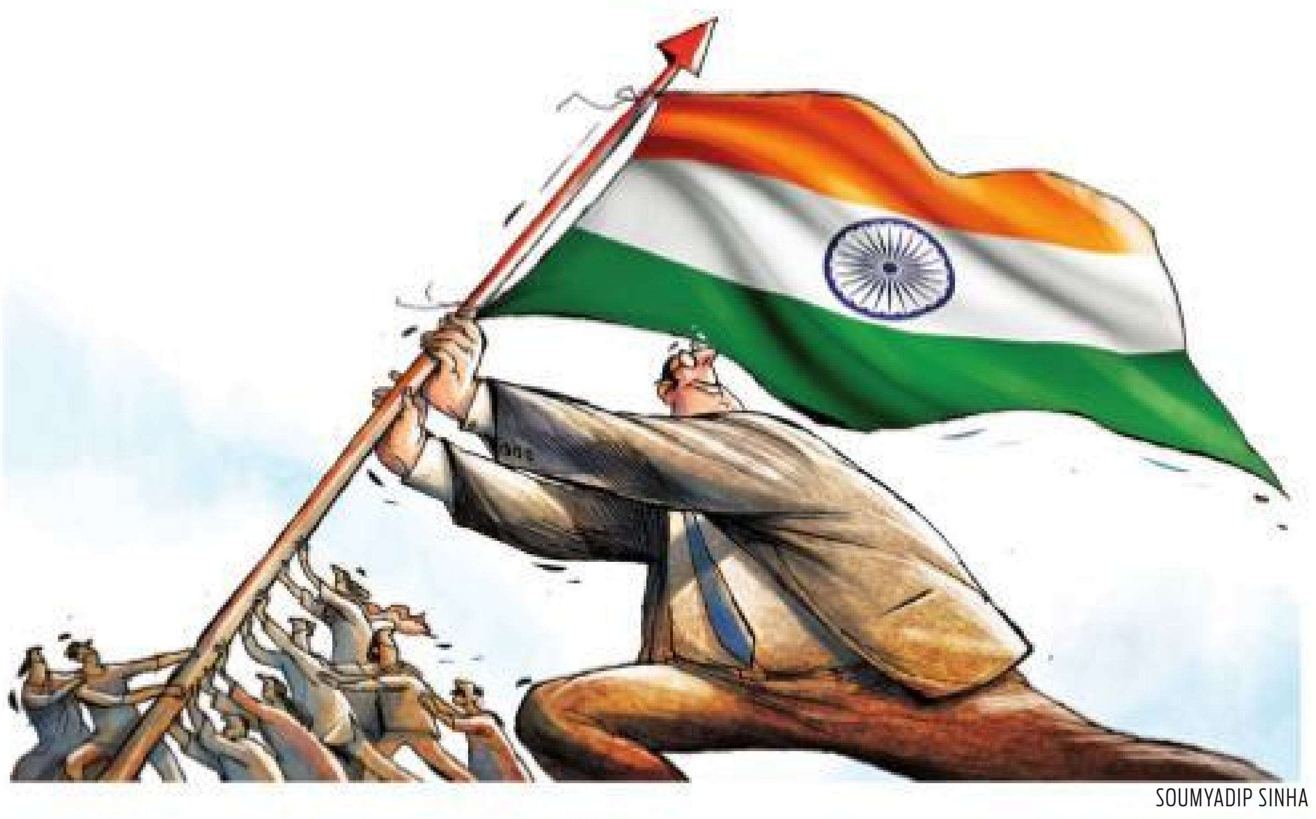
A new *Lancet Global Health* study shows that though the prevalence of child marriage in India fell sharply between 1993 and 2021, it crept up in a few states and territories during 2016-2021. While one in two girls was married before age 18 in 1993, the national average is closer to one in five now. But it is two in five in West Bengal, Tripura and Bihar, and has risen in Manipur, Punjab and Daman. Increasing inequality, forced migration and the pandemic have made things worse. Enforcing the legal ban is easier said than done. Bigger cash grants to those who marry at a proper age, especially in the laggard states, would be more effective.

The goal to become a developed nation a hundred years from independence is a worthy challenge. It can be achieved with the right mindset and people's participation

GOOD GOVERNANCE: PATHWAY TO VIKSIT BHARAT IN 2047

M VENKAIAH NAIDU

Former Vice President of India



SOUMYADIP SINHA

AS I reflect on the annual celebration of Good Governance Day on December 25, the birth anniversary of my mentor and former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, I recollect with admiration the visionary leadership of Sardar Patel, who shaped the higher civil services and laid the foundation for people-centred governance. His advice to the Indian Administrative Service officers in 1947 rings true even today: "Your predecessors were brought up in the traditions in which they kept themselves aloof from the common run of the people. It will be your bounden duty to treat the common men in India as your own." By putting people at the centre of the governance architecture, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has altered the grammar of good governance through his call to "reform, perform and transform".

The prime minister launched the Viksit Bharat Sankalp yatra on December 11. It is a defining moment in Bharat's historical journey as our country renews its commitment to be a developed country by 2047, a 100 years after it became independent. It is a resolve built on the foundation of 75 years of ceaseless toil and the newfound confidence and enhanced competence assiduously nurtured during the last 10 years.

It is a nation that is dreaming big. A nation of 1.4 billion dreams. It's a nation that wishes to become a 5-trillion-dollar economy, wants to have state-of-the-art infrastructure, provide its citizens equitable access to high-quality education and healthcare, enhance livelihood opportunities and enlarge the range of income-generating activities for its youth and women, and enthuse entrepreneurs and investors through an investor-friendly ecosystem to generate wealth and employment. It's a nation that does not want anyone to be left out of its development story.

Over the last few years, the government has placed unprecedented trust in the enormous capability of its people and has launched a number of programmes which have been quite successful because of people's participation. This is a government that could visualise *swachhata* or cleanliness as a people's movement. Janbhagidari or public participation has become the key principle of programme implementation.

In this paradigm of people-centred development, sushasan or good governance has become the most promising pathway for societal transformation for converting the gains of freedom or *swarajya* to the establishment of a well-governed state or *surajya*. The prime minister has tenaciously led this journey from the front, articulating the framework of inclusive development as "*Sabka saath, sabka vikaas, sabka vishwaas*" (Support for all, development of all and winning the confidence of all) to which was added the element of responsible citizenship and participative development through *"Sabka prayaas"* (Efforts of all).

In a recent interview, the prime minister said, "Our nation is on the cusp of a take-off." The country's rapid strides in various aspects of development have given us the power to reach this cusp. The string of achievements is truly impressive—from alleviating poverty to combating pandemics, from a national mission to strengthen foundation literacy and numeracy to creating world-class universities, from a massive financial inclusion programme to an impactful health insurance scheme, from a steadily expanding modern rail and aviation sector to spectacular space missions, from path-breaking advances in technology and pharmaceuticals to nurturing sports talent.

The path ahead is undoubtedly challenging. We have to be mindful of the fault lines, the areas that require more intense attention, some strategies that need mid-course correction and some policies that need fine-tuning.

The transformation we are envisaging is possible only through a critical appraisal of existing laws, rules and procedures and making them as people-friendly as possible, as transparent and demystified as possible, and conveyed in a user-friendly format in a language people understand. I am glad that this reform has received the personal attention of our country's leadership and many of the archaic laws have been repealed, some have been simplified and quite a few new legislations have been enacted.

Good governance is possible if every functionary in government is clear about the goals he or she has to achieve and her or his role in achieving the goals, as well as the time frame in which the tasks are expected to be completed. This goal and role clarity would be the first step. Constant capacity enhancement of functionaries through coaching and mentoring is essential. The managerial style and administrative leadership have to be revamped to facilitate this process rather than relying on the traditional command-and-control functions. The leaders must develop the art of listening to the people the government is seeking to serve; it enhances trust in government so essential in a democratic polity. Teamwork, collaboration, mutual respect, empathy and probity are traits that need to be internalised. The work ethos has to be reshaped to let these qualities bloom.

The governance system must be an agile, learning organisation, collecting credible data, analysing areas for correction and swiftly acting upon the evidence. This requires a mindset that values openness, honesty, reflection, consultation and working towards constant improvement.

If the pace of development has to be accelerated, we cannot have a business-as-usual approach. Governance has to be fit for purpose. Delivery is key. The last mile is the most difficult to reach but that's the ultimate test of our systemic strength. The low-hanging fruits are easy. We should not be satisfied with just that initial success. Leaving no one behind and ensuring that we achieve growth with equity is crucial for social harmony and sustainable, peaceful development.

PM Modi has demonstrated that technology can be leveraged for reaching out effectively to marginalised populations and cut transaction costs and petty corruption. Direct benefit transfer is one example of creative use of technology in improving last mile delivery.

In a few weeks' time, we shall be inaugurating a new temple for Lord Ram at Ayodhya, a king who, in our collective consciousness, exemplifies the values of good governance—truth, righteousness, respect for people's voice, collaborative endeavour to undertake challenging missions. There are many examples of good governance in Bharat's long history. We must draw inspiration from those examples and define the new governance systems that will ensure that we walk the path of dedication doing everything possible to create a society that cares, shares and grows, that is not shy of admitting its shortcomings and is bold enough to overcome them, that constantly reflects upon the impact of our decisions and actions on our planet, our quality of life and the quality of life of fellow human beings. Let us usher in Viksit Bharat in 2047 through *sushasit* Bharat.

HOW PROPHET ISAIAH ENRICHES THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

RENUKA NARAYANAN

FAITHLINE

HAPPY Christmas, dear readers. I am going, as usual, to Christmas lunch at the home of dear Christian friends of decades. I have also been to Midnight Mass with them in previous years and robustly sung the hymns and carols, all of which I knew by heart. In my childhood, I would go every year to a Christmas party held by my Mina Mami. We would gather around her piano and sing as she played carols and hymns. After that we would be treated to a splendid Christmassy dinner.

When I lived in Bangkok for some years, I would go on Sundays to the Ruamrudee Church. The Hindu temple was too far away and for me the church, too, was a house of God, where I liked to go, listen to the sermon and sing. Perhaps I learnt this from my father who was visiting New York one year. My mother's *shraadh* or death anniversary occurred during that visit. My father did not trouble anyone in a foreign land to find him a priest to conduct a puja as he did for her *shraadh* at home. He slipped quietly into a pew in St Patrick's Church and murmured the beautiful twenty-third Psalm—"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want".

But that is one of the treasures of being Indian. Religion and culture, ideally, are like a gigantic box of chocolates in which we can all dip freely and share each other's traditions. In the lead-up to this Christmas, I found myself thinking of the prophet Isaiah from the Old Testament in the Bible. His original Hebrew name is Yeshayahu, meaning 'Yahweh is salvation'. He lived in the eighth century BCE in Jerusalem and declared the coming of a messiah whom he called 'Immanuel', meaning 'God is With Us'. The events of the Book of Isaiah are said to have occurred between 740 and 680 BCE during the reigns of the Jewish kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah which was near the time of the founding of Rome and the first Olympic games in Greece. However, Jews and Christians interpret Isaiah differently.

Christians see the Old Testament through the lens of Jesus. The New Testament has four gospels or accounts of Jesus attributed to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. In Christian tradition, The Book of Isaiah is also referred to as the 'fifth gospel' because of these proclamations: "Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: The young girl will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14), and, "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5). Also, poignantly, "We, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6)

Isaiah, say Biblical scholars, was well-acquainted with poverty and harsh circumstances. He observed with dismay that the Jewish people of the time led self-indulgent lives. He was also alarmed by the impending danger to Jerusalem by the Assyrian king in his westward expansion of the kingdom.

AP

One can trace the Christmas spirit to prophet Isaiah from the Old Testament. The Book of Isaiah is referred to as the 'fifth gospel' since he made proclamations that were later fulfilled by Jesus

Isaiah is said to have addressed Yahweh, the god of the Jews, with his fears for his people. He is said to have had a glorious vision of his god and though he felt inadequate, offered himself as a messenger in service of Yahweh. Thus, he was made a prophet of his time to warn that Yahweh's covenant or special understanding with the Jews, who were his 'chosen people', could turn against them if they did not lead morally directed lives. In despair, Isaiah famously cried "How long, O Lord?"

Isaiah thundered at his people, "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear." (Isaiah 59:2). His warning did not go down well with his people. They refused to listen to him and turned him away several times. Isaiah's words are said to be addressed to the southern part of the Jewish homeland, called Judah. The northern kingdom was called Israel. Scholars say that the Book of Isaiah was partly written by Isaiah's followers, and that it took its full form in the Bible in the fifth century BCE, long after Isaiah. The Book of Isaiah grew increasingly important in Christian interpretation.

It is seen as a book of hope, promising Yahweh's mercy through verses like this: "They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations." (Isaiah 61:4), which must have greatly consoled the Jews in their exile. It promises the Jewish people that "The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail." (Isaiah 58:11).

Seen by Christians to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy, Jesus is believed to have said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the good news." (Mark 1:15). Mark's is the first gospel. Luke, a doctor, puts it this way: "Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is! ' or 'There it is! ' The kingdom of God is among you." (Luke 17:20-21). John, the youngest apostle, identifies Jesus with the Word of God. Matthew, a tax collector, who referred to Isaiah, says that Jesus declared, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17). Paul preached the gospel to many thereafter. And thus, says Christian tradition, was the Christmas message relayed across time from ancient days.

(shebaba09@gmail.com)

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

One post

Ref: *India bloc needs a slogan,not a leader* (Dec 24). Prabhu Chawla is right in saying that the Congress defeat is a blessing in disguise. Till recently the GOP thought that it had enough power to tackle the BJP single handedly. There is a chance the parties within INDIA group may not unite as the goal of each one would be to become the PM, but unfortunately there is only one post.

M Haneef, Kottayam

LDF's credibility

Ref: *Clashes, protest mar Nava Kerala Sadas culmination* (Dec 24). The Nava Kerala Sadas, throughout its journey was marred by black-flags wielding demonstrations and ugly lathi charge by the police. The yatra eroded the remaining credibility of the LDF. The bus jaunt taken by CM Pinarayi Vijayan and his cabinet looked like a great escape from the realities that the state is facing.

S Lakshmi, Hyderabad

INDIA's leader?

Ref: *K'taka Cong leaders caught off-guard by 'Kharge for PM ' pitch* (Dec 24). Kharge was not a unanimous choice. His name was floated by TMC and AAP for sidelining Gandhi family. The reaction in Karnataka was muted due to high command's reticence on the issue. This alliance may not choose a leader before elections to avoid disputes.

Rajarao Kumar, Bengaluru

Battling pollution

The air quality index (AQI) in the national capital on Saturday morning was recorded under 'severe' category. Fog and haze, with low wind speed are the major causes. Commission for air quality management, should make strategies to combat pollution.

Ibne Farooq, Ausanpur

Going bananas

Ref: *Going bananas for weight loss* (Dec 24). One should also adhere to the other components of the diet. It would be good to exercise caution on the potassium content, especially those with compromised kidney function. Dairy products—on which there is a restriction in this diet—are an important for vegetarians.

Dr Janardhan, Neyveli

Grave issue

Three civilians picked up by the Army for questioning, a day after four Jawans were killed, were found dead with multiple injuries. Five more persons are admitted to hospital with serious injuries. This relates to the video that shows jawans stripping three men and putting chilli powder on them. It is a matter of great concern.

Jayanthi S Mani, Coimbatore

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POSTS OF THE DAY

Pralhad Joshi @JoshiPralhad
Wherever Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi go for campaigns, Congress loses. They have withdrawn to save face. It makes no difference to BJP.

Kunwar Danish Ali @KDanishAli
Ask the harassed wrestlers, unemployed youth, innocents in jails, or ask me, who was abused on floor of Parliament, what suffering means.

Mehbooba Mufti @MehboobaMufti
One doesn't know what to condemn more. Killing of 5 army jawans who laid their lives in the line of duty or civilians tortured to death in the most barbaric way by those supposed to protect us from the enemy?

Run-up to '24: BJP mulls 2 mega rallies of minorities

The 'alpsankhyak sabhas' will be held in January and February 2024

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ New Delhi

AS a part of its strategy to win over minority communities, mostly Muslims, in the run-up to Lok Sabha elections early next year, the BJP has planned two mega 'Alpsankhyak Sabha' in January and February next year.

Aimed at creating a positive narrative among the minorities for the Modi government and its nine-year performances, the first mega 'Alpsankhyak Sabha' will be organized in Delhi in January and the second in West Bengal's Malda district in February. Jamal Siddiqui, national president of the BJP Minority Morcha, told this newspaper on Sunday that the first such Sabha would most probably be attended and addressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Delhi.

"We expect more than 25,000 people from various minority communities including Muslims, Modi-Mitras, Sufi scholars and other prominent people from various walks of life belonging to Muslims and other communities," he said.

"We'd request Home Minister Amit Shah to attend the second Sabha and address various issues concerning the minority people," said Siddiqui. Party chief JP Nadda will attend both Sabhas, he added.

"The dates are being decided taking into account the availability of chief guests," he said. The BJP has also decided to organize the 'Alpsankhyak-Samvad' in each assembly segment ahead of the LS elections.

The Samvad-Karyakarm (dialogue programme) will include prominent people from minority communities, including 2 lakh Modi Mitras and Sufi saints. They will deliberate on welfare schemes with party leaders and discuss measures initiated by the government in the last nine years.

"There Alpsankhyak Samvad will be a two-way communication," he said. The Minority Morcha has made 2.5 lakh Modi Mitras from Muslim and other minority communities who have liked the performance of the Modi government.

Meanwhile, a senior party source said various BJP fronts are carrying out a slew of activities and outreach programmes intending to win over 350 seats in the 2024 general election.

"The Modi Mitra is an innovative initiative of BJP Minority Morcha for those who are not in politics but like Modi's works and support him based on his works," he said.

Ahead of the proposed Alpasankhyak Sabha, a conference of Modi Mitras was recently held in Malda. The Morcha has recently also organised a 'Sufi Samvad Maha Abhiyan' in Delhi with the participation of the Sufis from various Dargahs of Delhi. He said Modi Mitras have been made in 65 Lok Sabha constituencies.

'ALPSANKHYAK-SAMVAD' IN EACH CONSTITUENCY

The dates for Alpsankhyak Sabha' are being decided taking into account the availability of chief guests. The BJP has also decided to organize the 'Alpsankhyak-Samvad' in each assembly segment ahead of the LS elections. The dialogue programme will include prominent people from minority communities, including 2 lakh Modi Mitras and Sufi saints.

EAM to talk trade in local currency on 4-day Russia visit

YESHI SELI @ New Delhi

WHILE this is the second year in a row that the India-Russia Summit has not been held, External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar is scheduled to visit Russia for four days from December 25. The visit is part of an ongoing high-level exchange between the two nations.

"During the visit, Jaishankar will meet with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Trade and Industry, Denis Manturov, and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. There will be discussions on bilateral issues, multilateral issues and international issues. The focus will also be on the strong people-to-people and cultural ties amongst the two nations. Jaishankar will have meetings in Saint Petersburg and Moscow," said the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in a statement.

The India-Russia relations are considered 'Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership'.

Discussions are likely to be held on the expansion of trade in local currencies, investments and enhancing defence partnership.

The bilateral trade between India and Russia during 2022-23 was $49.36 billion. Indian exports were in the range of $3.14 billion, while imports from Russia were around $46.21 billion. During April-May 2023-24, India's trade with Russia saw 161.22 per cent increase compared to the same period last year.

Meanwhile, the last annual summit between Prime Minister of India and President of Russian Federation was held on December 6, 2021. That was the 21st India-Russia Annual Summit held in Delhi, and was attended by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Prime Minister Modi was to visit Russia in 2022. However, the outbreak of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine on February 24, 2022, led to the summit being skipped for the second consecutive year.

Trade

India-Russia bilateral trade in 2022-23 was $49.36 billion. Indian exports were in the range of $3.14 billion, while imports from Russia were around $46.21 billion. During April-May 2023-24, India's trade with Russia saw 161.22 per cent increase YoY.

POWER GAMES

SHAHID FARIDI
The writer is Resident Editor
TNIE, New Delhi.
Email: shahid@newindianexpress.com

Battle for UP

AKHILESH THREATENS TO QUIT INDIA OVER BSP

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav's seemingly unprovoked outburst at the December 19 INDIA meeting over the possible inclusion of Bahujan Samaj Party in the opposition grouping left most of the attendees shocked. Akhilesh had announced at the meeting that his party would quit INDIA if the Bahujan Samaj Party was brought on board. He said he has heard that a move is afoot to rope in Mayawati. The leaders of opposition parties present in the meeting were surprised by the SP chief's comments as there has been no discussion on the induction of the BSP in any of the four meetings of the group held so far. According to sources, Akhilesh feels that a powerful section of the Congress is keen to ally with the BSP in Uttar Pradesh and it is only a matter of time before the induction of the party in the opposition group is proposed. His statement at the meeting was an attempt to pre-empt any such proposal. Mayawati, who has kept away from both the INDIA bloc and the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, was quick to remind the opposition leaders that "no one knows who might need whom in the future for the sake of the public and the country". Directly targeting Akhilesh Yadav, she said parties that make such statements may face embarrassment later. Mayawati's quick response to Akhilesh's outburst is being seen as her readiness to do business with the opposition. The main battle for the 2024 elections is likely to be fought in Uttar Pradesh with both the ruling and opposition parties preparing to pull out all the stops.

Strategic Alliance

CONG TO REOPEN TALKS WITH PRASHANT KISHOR

The Congress is likely to restart talks with poll strategist-turned-politician Prashant Kishor. The earlier talks between the two had broken down as Kishor wanted a position next to the Congress president with a free hand to manage all elections for the party. The party refused to accept his proposal as it would have rendered the entire party structure powerless with all powers, including selecting state presidents, conducting surveys and choosing candidates, going to Kishor. But the situation has now changed with Kishor confining himself to Bihar, where the Congress has no leader of repute. According to sources, Congress leadership has expressed interest in working with Kishor in Bihar for the next Lok Sabha election. Kishor too has indicated his readiness by announcing that he is closer to the ideology of the Congress than that of any other party. Sources said that the newly-appointed Congress incharge of Bihar Mohan Prakash is likely to be asked to start discussions with Kishor. Congress leaders did not rule out the possibility of fielding Kishor as an opposition alliance candidate in the Lok Sabha elections from Bihar. Congress also plans to use Kishor's services to manage the party's campaign in the next general election. His former deputy Sunil Kanugolu has delivered stellar results for the party in the Karnataka and Telangana assembly elections. This has reaffirmed the party's faith in professional poll managers. Kishor and Kanugolu are likely to handle Congress campaign in the next election.

2 months after PMO order, NMC members yet to disclose assets on website

KAVITA BAJELI-DATT @ New Delhi

DESPITE directions from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) two months ago, the National Medical Commission (NMC) members are yet to declare their assets online.

The PMO directed the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to take "appropriate action" on a complaint against non-disclosure of assets by NMC members, including its chairman, on October 23.

In fact, NMC has written to the ministry — at least twice — to change the disclosure format. According to the letters, some members have reservations with the present format, where they have to give complete details of land, jewellery, investments in banks, insurance policies, etc.

As per the NMC Act 2019, the chairman and members must declare their assets and liabilities on the official website.

However, despite several RTIs in this regard, the NMC chairman and its members have failed to declare their assets on the website, said Dr K V Babu, who has been doggedly pursuing the matter for months. "It is clear that the NMC has been sitting over the assets disclosure for the past two-and-half years, and it seems that the health ministry, which is legally mandated to enforce the NMC Act, is sleeping over it for more than six months, despite several RTIs in this regard," the RTI activist said.

"What is more shocking is that even after the communication from the PMO, both the NMC and health ministry continue to drag the issue. Hope the NMC will comply with the NMC Act, given the communication from the PMO, and non-complying officers are removed," he added.

"If the Supreme Court and High Court judges can declare their assets publicly, why can't the NMC members and its chairman?" the activist asked.

Navy to commission indigenous stealth destroyer INS Imphal

MAYANK SINGH @ New Delhi

THE Indian Navy will commission its latest Stealth Guided Missile Destroyer **INS Imphal**, being constructed under the Project 15-B, at Naval Dockyard in Mumbai on Tuesday.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will be the chief guest for the commissioning ceremony.

"The time taken to build Imphal and for her trials is the shortest for any indigenous destroyer," the Navy said.

Imphal's keel was laid on May 19, 2017 and the ship was launched into water on 20 April 2019. Imphal sailed out for her maiden sea trials on 28 April 2023 and completed a comprehensive schedule of trials, both in the harbour and at sea, leading up to its Delivery on 20 October 2023, within a record time frame of six months - the fastest for a ship of its size."

It is the first warship to have been named after a city from the North East, the approval for which was accorded by the President on April 16, 2019, Indian Navy PRO Commander Vivek Madhwal said.

On November 28, Rajnath Singh unveiled the ship's crest at New Delhi, in the presence of the Manipur Chief Minister, N Biren Singh, CDS Gen Anil Chauhan and Indian Navy chief Admiral R Hari Kumar and other senior dignitaries.

The ship once commissioned will join the Western Naval Command. Imphal is a state-of-the-art warship, designed by the Indian Navy's Warship Design Bureau and built by MDL, with significant contributions from the public and private sectors, including MSMEs, and the Defence Research and Development Organisation.

Measuring 163 metres in length, displacing 7,400 tons and with 75% indigenous content, Imphal can rightfully be regarded as one of the most potent warships to have been constructed in India.

The ship is equipped to fight under Nuclear, Biological and Chemical warfare conditions and has a high degree of automation and stealth features.

Man-elephant conflict: 1,701 people dead in 3 years

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

DESPITE the government initiating measures, wild elephants have killed as many as 1,701 people in 16 states between 2020 and 2023 with the highest of 605 casualties reported in 2022-23.

According to the government data, of the total casualties in 2022-23, a total of 148 deaths were reported from Odisha, followed by West Bengal with 97, and Chhattisgarh with 96 in addition to others. The figure stood at 535 in 2021-22.

In 2020-21, a total of 461 human casualties were reported that rose to 535 the following year in states which have wider and dense forest coverage housing considerable number of elephants.

While Jharkhand had reported the highest number of 133 casualties due to in 2021-22, Odisha replaced it the next year 148 deaths, the government data indicates.

As per an official data shared by the government during the recent Rajya Sabha session, Odisha had reported the highest number of 93 human casualties in 2020-21, overtaken by Jharkhand in 2021-22 with 133 human casualties.

Notably, all these 16 states have not only reported human casualties, but also elephant deaths due to various reasons.

In the last five years — 2018-19 to 2022-23 — the 16 states had reported total deaths of 75 elephants after being knocked down by trains passing through the forest areas.

"Fifteen elephants were killed in 2022-23 and 2021-22, while 14 died in 2019-20. In 2018-19, the figure was the highest with 19 jumbos losing their lives after being knocked down by the locomotives of trains in 10 states — Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Tripura, Odisha, Kerala, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Assam," said an official data.

Similarly, a total of 379 elephant lives were lost to electrocution in the last 5 years in 10 states, including 100 in 2022-23, 57 in 2021-22, 65 in 2020-21, 76 in 2019-20 and 81 in 2018-19.

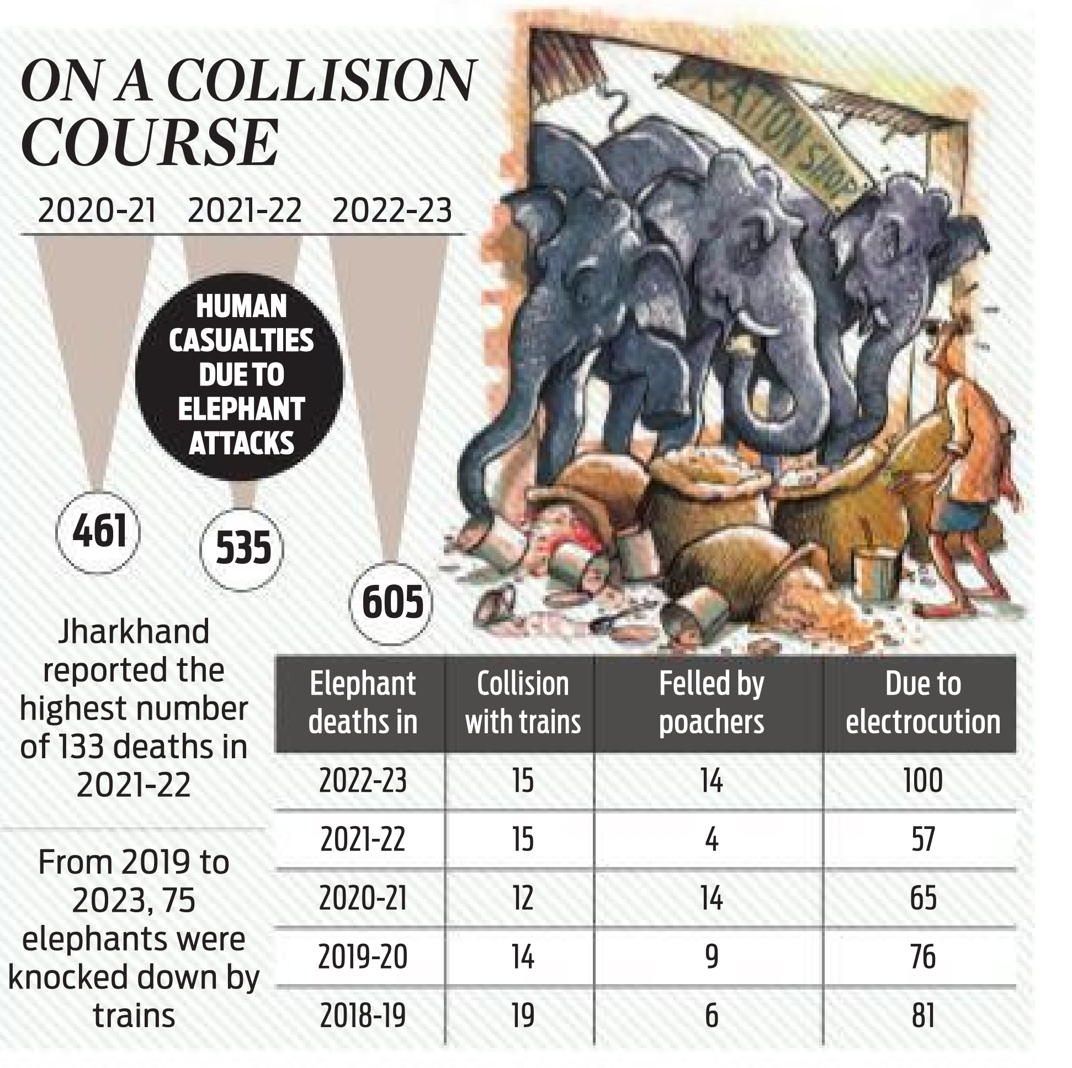
In 2022-23, the deaths of 14 elephants due to poaching were reported, 4 in 2021-22, 14 in 2020-21, 9 in 2019-20 and 6 in 2018-19 from 16 states namely, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, UP, Uttarakhand, Odisha, Meghalaya, Kerala, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and other states.

In total, 47 elephant casualties were reported in last 5 years from across the 16 states due to poaching.

Odisha again reported the highest number of 8 elephant casualties due to poaching in 2022-23, followed Meghalaya with 3. In 2021-22, Tamil Nadu had reported the highest number of 3 elephant casualties, compared to 7 in Meghalaya in 2020-21.

As per the government data, 21 elephants were poisoned to deaths in the 16 states in the last 5 years with the highest number being of six reported from Assam in 2021-22.

ON A COLLISION COURSE



Jharkhand reported the highest number of 133 deaths in 2021-22

From 2019 to 2023, 75 elephants were knocked down by trains

Elephant deaths in	Collision with trains	Felled by poachers	Due to electrocution
2022-23	15	14	100
2021-22	15	4	57
2020-21	12	14	65
2019-20	14	9	76
2018-19	19	6	81

India may miss international target of eliminating child labour by 2025

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

A parliamentary standing committee on labour, textiles and skill development in its 52nd report on 'National Policy on Child Labourers' has said that it was "practically not possible" to meet the international commitment to eliminating child labour by 2025.

The panel took into account the current prevalence of child labour to reach its conclusion. The report was recently submitted in Parliament.

The committee has impressed upon the Ministry of Labour and Employment to take up the elimination of child labour in a mission mode by devising a systematic action plan-based policy to meet international commitments.

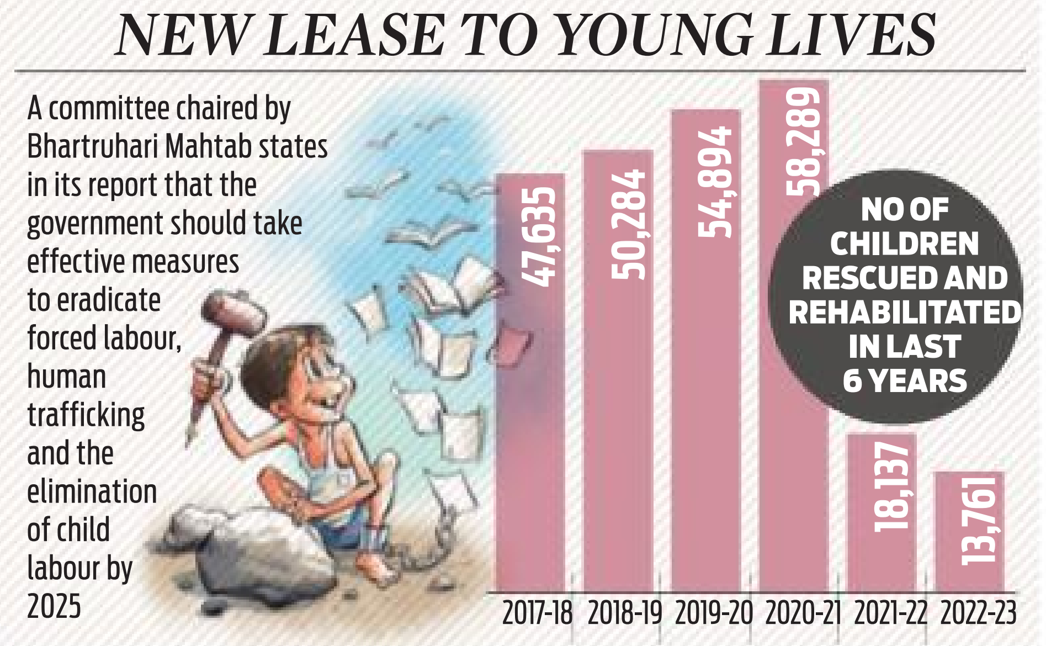
The committee, chaired by Bhartruhari Mahtab, has stated in the report that the government should take effective measures to eradicate forced labour, human trafficking and the elimination of child labour by 2025. After wider consultations with state governments and other stakeholders, the committee has stated in the report that "despite a revision of penalties, there is no deterrence on the employer and as informed by NGOs, children after being rescued are again employed in the same jobs."

Alarmed at the recurrence, the committee has emphasized making laws more stringent for employers and violators. It suggested increasing at least 3-4 times the penalty with stricter punishment in the form of cancellations of licence and attachment of property.

It has also cited data collected from the Ministry based on the census 2011 that 1.01 crore children are working in various fields. The main children workers are those who have to work more than six months and those who work less than 6 months after being employed. They are called working children.

According to data, cited by the committee as per the 2001 census, 57,54,201 children are main workers in the age group of 5-14 years in agriculture, mining and 8 other industries.

NEW LEASE TO YOUNG LIVES



A committee chaired by Bhartruhari Mahtab states in its report that the government should take effective measures to eradicate forced labour, human trafficking and the elimination of child labour by 2025

TRAIN ON FIRE

A fire broke out in the pantry car of the Delhi-bound Sadbhavana Express near the Shivanagar Railway station of the district on Sunday, officials said. The passengers in the adjoining coaches alighted from the trainon time.

02 KILLED IN ACCIDENT IN RAJASTHAN

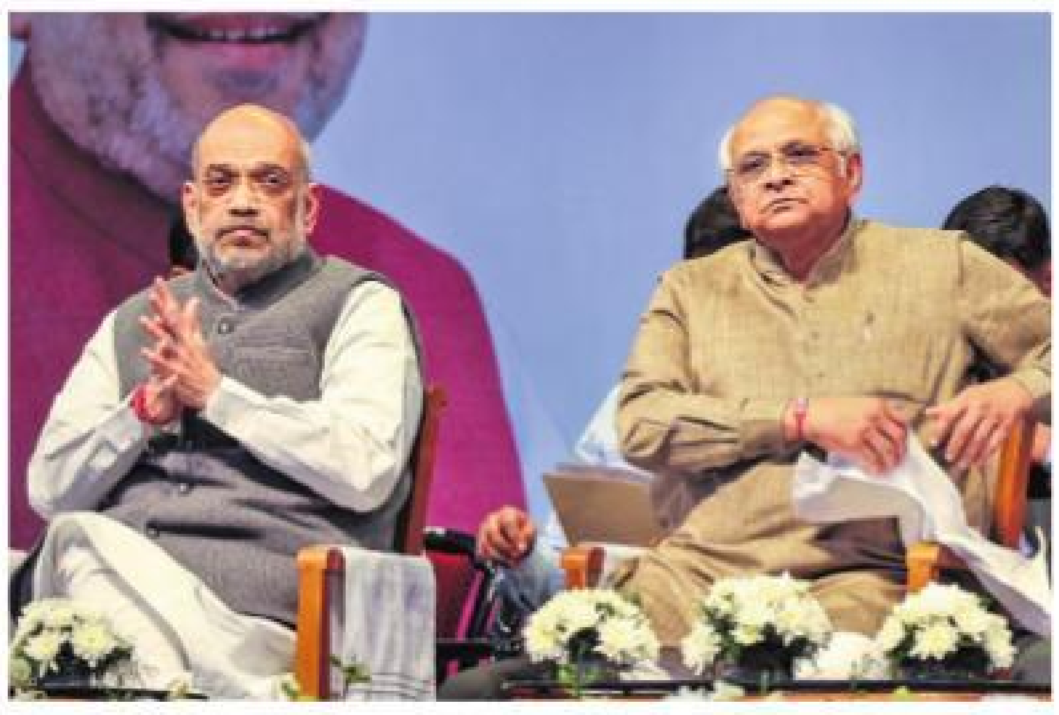
INDIA	Max	Min		Max	Min
Ahmedabad	42	27	Mumbai	35	29
Bhopal	43	28	Panaji	32	28
Jaipur	41	30	Patna	41	27
Amritsar	40	23	Lucknow	42	27
Chennai	39	30	Port Blair	34	28
Kolkata	36	26	Imphal	23	18
Srinagar	18	08	Chandigarh	42	23

PM to make poor self-reliant: Shah

Says crores of people have benefited from govt's welfare schemes, more in the pipeline

DILIP SINGH KSHATRIYA @Ahmedabad

UNION Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants to make 140 crore people, including the poor, in the country 'atmanirbhar' (self-reliant) and has worked with dedication for it. PM Modi wants to make India self-reliant in space technology and defence, and also aims to make the poor people self-reliant, Shah said addressing a gathering of beneficiaries of the PM SVANidhi scheme, which helps street vendors get easy loans.



Home Minister Amit Shah, Gujarat CM Bhupendra Patel in Ahmedabad on Sunday | PTI

The Union minister said poor people have benefited the most under the Modi government.

Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel was also present in the function to give loans to beneficiaries of the Prime Minister Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM-SVANidhi scheme). Shah is on a day's visit to his constituency where he is scheduled to attend various events. "In the last nine years, around 3 crore people got their own homes, four crore people got electricity connections, 10 crore people got gas cylinders, 12 crore people got toilets, 80 crore people got free ration, and 60 crore people have been covered under the Rs 5 lakh health insurance (scheme)," Shah said.

Various schemes are being implemented to bring the poor people out of poverty, Shah said. "The vision of a developed India includes not just highways, overbridges, and the Moon landing. Every Indian citizen must get a house, drinking water, electricity, a gas cylinder, besides the poor should get 5 kg of grain. That is the vision of a developed India," said the Union Home Minister.

"We finished the onerous task of defending 140 crore citizens of the nation against the Covid-19 outbreak by developing our vaccine under the direction of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in trying circumstances. We also sent vaccinations to other nations," Shah said.

Talking about the success of the PM-SVANidhi scheme, he said: "In my constituency (Gandhinagar in Gujarat), over 1.5 lakh people have availed of the benefit of PM-SVANidhi scheme, under which financial assistance is given to those who are running small businesses and handcarts without any collateral," he said. In Kalol, Shah said it was Prime Minister Modi who paid "real tributes" to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel by building the Statue of Unity and a dedicated museum for him. He accused the Congress of ignoring his contribution.

The Statue of Unity, built in honour of Sardar Patel, near the Sardar Sarovar Dam in Gujarat's Narmada district is the tallest such structure in the world at 182 metres. It was inaugurated by PM Modi in October 2018. Addressing a gathering after inaugurating a statue of Sardar Patel in Kalol, the senior BJP leader said that the Congress party did not even build a memorial for him where he was cremated.

"You would not know the work done by Sardar Patel if you did not travel out of Gujarat. When I was in Gujarat, I used to think that I knew everything about him. But after I went out (of the state) as party functionary, I could comprehend task he carried out," said Shah.

'PM-SVANidhi scheme'

Talking about the success of the PM-SVANidhi scheme, Amit Shah pointed out that in his constituency (Gandhinagar in Gujarat), over 1.5 lakh people have availed of the benefit of PM-SVANidhi scheme, under which financial assistance is given to those who are running small businesses and handcarts without any collateral. In Kalol, Shah said it was Prime Minister Modi who paid "real tributes" to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel by building the Statue of Unity and a dedicated museum for him. He accused the Congress of ignoring his contribution

Yadav to meet Guv, set to expand his ministerial team

ANURAAG SINGH @Bhopal

AFTER meeting BJP president JP Nadda in Delhi, MP Chief Minister Mohan Yadav confirmed that the new ministers will be sworn in at Bhopal on Monday afternoon. As per sources, over 25 ministers may take oath on Monday, including eight to ten new faces.

The new MP CM Dr Mohan Yadav who has been in Delhi since Saturday evening (third time within a week) meeting senior national BJP leaders will return to Bhopal on Sunday late night, after meeting the party's national president JP Nadda.

He will meet the MP Governor Mangubhai C Patel on Monday morning to seek time for the swearing in of the new ministers. The swearing in ceremony of the new ministers is likely on the same afternoon.

As per informed sources in the state government and the BJP, a total of 18-22 ministers could be sworn in. The size of the cabinet cannot exceed 35, including the CM.

Dr Yadav's first team of ministers is likely to be a blend of old and new faces, MLAs from all six regions, major castes and all key Lok Sabha constituencies.

Though the list of the BJP MLAs likely to take oath is yet not out, sources claimed that out of the 18-22 ministers, to be sworn in on Monday, 8-10 could be new faces. It, however, remains to be seen if any of the heavyweights, including party's national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya and Prahlad Singh Patel (both were in CM's race) are sworn in as ministers in the new council of ministers or not.

Blend of old & new faces

MP CM Dr Mohan Yadav's first team of ministers is likely to be a blend of old and new faces, MLAs from all six regions, major castes and all key Lok Sabha constituencies. Though the list of the BJP MLAs likely to take oath is yet not out, sources claimed that out of the 18-22 ministers, to be sworn in on Monday, 8-10 could be new faces. The size of the cabinet cannot exceed 35.

CHANDIGARH DIARY

HARPREET BAJWA
Our correspondent
in Chandigarh
hsbajwa73@gmail.com

Why no MLA fund in Punjab: Oppn to AAP

With the AAP government increasing the MLA Local Development Fund (MLALAD) from ₹4 to ₹7 crore, the Opposition in Punjab has started questioning senior AAP leader and Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann over the absence of such funds in the state. Sandeep Jakhar, the Congress MLA from Abohar, said during the Assembly poll campaign, AAP promised to replicate the 'Delhi model' of health, education and power in the state. "Mann sir, as you are always telling us that the treasury is full, maybe it's time to implement this Delhi model in Punjab too.... here MLALAD fund is zero," he posted on X.

Home minister lauds Chandigarh Police

During his visit to Chandigarh, Union Home Minister Amit Shah lauded the UT Police for its beat system, which he said, other UTs and States are copying, and several innovative measures taken by the force. Recently, Chandigarh Police held hackathons to utilise youth knowledge. Shah said platforms like hackathons will help in solving the problems being faced by the people. The home minister also held a meeting with Chandigarh DGP Praveer Ranjan and other senior officers and asked them to prepare a road map for better implementation of laws.

Shah lays foundation stone for projects

Union Home Minister Amit Shah recently visited Chandigarh and inaugurated and laid the foundation stone for projects worth ₹400 crore. Punjab Governor Banwarilal Purohit, who is also the administrator of the UT and Chandigarh Mayor Anup Gupta, were among the dignitaries present on the occasion. However, the event was given a miss by Kirron Kher, senior BJP leader and Member of Parliament from the UT, leading to several speculations. Meanwhile, as the home minister was present, the Punjab Governor utilised the oppurtunity to discuss the issue of the vacant UT Adviser post. The Ministry of Home Affairs is yet to name his replacement.

LAND LAWS

Organizations & Oppn unite in Dehradun rally

NARENDRA SETHI @Dehradun

ON the call of various social organisations and opposition parties, the "Uttarakhand Mool Niwas Swabhiman Maharally" was organized in Dehradun on Sunday. The objective of the Maharally was to enact the domicile law in Uttarakhand, especially to emphasise the cut-off date of 26 January 1950 and to put before the government the demand for implementing a strong land law in the state.

Several social organisations, assembled under the Uttarakhand Moolniwas Swabhiman Samanvay Samiti, held a massive rally and later marched in Dehradun on Sunday to advocate for their demands of a stringent land law and increasing employment opportunities for local residents.

Mohit Dimri, convener of Samiti said, "This is a fight for the honour and rights of the people of Uttarakhand. On behalf of the government, the members linked with the Sangharsh Samiti were contacted and requested to postpone the rally". On Sunday, transgenders also joined the agitation where they demanded the government to strengthen strict land laws and domicile laws.

Maha Assembly ousts convicted Cong MLA over ₹125 cr bank fraud

SUDHIR SURYAWANSHI @Mumbai

FOLLOWING the conviction by the Nagpur Special magistrate court, the Maharashtra state legislature disqualified former minister and Congress MLA **Sunil Kedar** on Saturday in connection with ₹125 crore financial irregularities in Nagpur District Central Cooperative Bank (NDCCB) in 2002

Maharashtra state legislature secretary Jitendra Bhole issued the notifications disqualifying Congress MLA Sunil Kedar. As per the provisions in Article 191 (1)(e) of the Constitution of India read with Section 8 of the Representation of People's Act. The action was taken after Nagpur police informed the legislature about the conviction.

"Now, therefore, in accordance with sub-clause (a)of clause (3) of article 190 of the Constitution of India, the seat of Shri Kedar, has become vacant from the date of his conviction, i.e. 22nd December 2023," the notification said.

Maharashtra Congress spokesperson Atul Londe Patil said when it comes to disqualifying BJP MLA, the ruling party uses all loopholes of the law and protects their elected representatives even though they are convicted by the court. He said the law should be equal for everyone, but there are different sets of law, one for the ruling establishment while another for the Oppositions and people who are raising their dissent against the establishment.

"We do respect the court decisions against Kedar in the 22 years old case, but why so much hurry to disqualify him? If BJP MLAs and MPs are found guilty by the court in a case, they are given ample opportunity to appeal the court ruling and the ruling party also makes all efforts to save these convicted elected representatives. The laws are brazenly misused by the ruling party to cut the opposition in size," Patil said.

Bengal Guv removes Jadavpur VC ahead of 'unauthorised convocation'

PRANAB MONDAL @Kolkata

WEST Bengal governor **C.V. Ananda Bose**, late on Saturday, removed the officiating vice-chancellor of Jadavpur University, Budhhadeb Sau, a day before the university is scheduled to hold its annual convocation and warned that the expenses incurred to organise the 'unauthorised' convocation would be deducted from Sau's salary. Sau on Sunday defied the governor's order and officiated the university's annual convocation.

'Money to be recovered'

A Raj Bhavan official said the governor, who is also the chancellor of the university, has said that the public money incurred on unauthorised convocation would be recovered from the salary of the VC and others responsible. "The governor is seeking legal opinion on this," he added. Sau defied governor's order and held the convocation

> **The executive council meeting was held on December 18 and modalities of the convocation were discussed. The university requested higher education department to grant funds for organising the convocation** — Official of the university

"The decision to continue as the acting VC of the university is for the sake of the students of the institution," said Sau.

The governor's decision came after the university authorities decided to go ahead with its annual convocation event on December 24 after getting a permission from the state higher education department, despite objections raised by the governor, the ex-officio chancellor of all state-run universities.

"The authorisation given to Prof Budhhadeb Sau dated August 17, 2023, to exercise the powers and perform duties of the office of the vice-chancellor, is withdrawn. The order will take immediate effect," stated the letter.

A Raj Bhavan official said the governor, who is also the chancellor of the university, has said that the public money incurred on this unauthorised convocation would be recovered from the salary of the VC and others responsible. "The governor is seeking legal opinion on this," he added.

The state higher education department granted permission to university authorities to hold meetings of the executive council and the court to discuss issues related to organising the convocation, clearing the path for annual convocation but not the honorary degree event on December 24.

"The executive council meeting was held on December 18 and modalities of the convocation were discussed. The university authorities requested the higher education department to grant funds for organising the convocation," said an official of the university.

The problem surfaced when the governor, as a chancellor, refused to allow the authorities to hold the court meeting to ratify decisions to go ahead with the convocation.

Sau said he received two letters, one from the governor and the other from the state government. "I put both the letters before the University's court which asked me to continue," he said,

1 lakh join Gita chant, PM says good for harmony

PRANAB MONDAL @Kolkata

EXTENDING his best wishes to the Gita recitation event by one lakh participants in Brigade Parade Ground on Sunday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his belief that the recitation by a huge gathering from diverse backgrounds will not only enhance social harmony but also infuse energy into nation's development journey.

BJP supporters, devotees at Bhagwad Gita recitation event in Kolkata on Sunday|PTI

Though the organisers of the event, Lokhho Konthe Gitapatha Committee, an association of several organisations, claimed that the Prime Minister would be present at the mega programme but Modi skipped the invitation.

"I am positive that the recitation of Srimad Bhagavad Gita by such a huge gathering of people who have come together from different walks of life will not only boost social harmony but will also infuse energy into our nation's development journey," Modi said in his message to the organisers.

In his message, Modi described the Hindu scripture as a practical guide providing a path to lead a meaningful life. "It also serves as a handbook to navigate through the challenges of life," he said.

The Prime Minister highlighted India's cultural heritage as a blend of lofty traditions, profound knowledge and philosophical-wisdom. "Inclusivity, cultural diversity and harmony are our inherent strengths. Whether it is Jana Bhakti, Karma or any other path, the Gita offers multiple different but eventually connected paths to attain progress," he mentioned in the message.

Modi concluded his message by expressing his optimism about the period until 2047, describing it as an opportunity to fulfil the vision of building a strong, developed and inclusive Bharat through collective efforts.

Sharing Modi's message on his official social media account, BJP's state president Sukanta Majumdar emphasised the unwavering support received from the Prime Minister as encouraging and heartwarming for all. The Brigade Parade Ground, Kolkata's prime seat to organise protest programmes, echoed when about 1 lakh people chanted verses from Gita.

Adorned in traditional attires, people from various age groups and social status congregated at the iconic venue.

Though the event was said to be an apolitical one, but many found it was organised to spred BJP's Hindutva rhetoric as the organisers have connections with the saffron camp's ideological wings. Many said the event was organised days before the grand inauguration of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya at the hands of Modi ahead of the next year's Lok Sabha polls.

'Cultural blend'

Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted India's cultural heritage as a blend of lofty traditions, profound knowledge and philosophical-wisdom. "Inclusivity, cultural diversity and harmony are our inherent strengths. Whether it is Jana Bhakti, Karma or any other path, the Gita offers multiple different but eventually connected paths to attain progress," In his message, Modi described the Hindu scripture as a practical guide providing a path to lead a meaningful life

In a first, J'khand's Gumla to equip all govt buildings with QR codes

MUKESH RANJAN @Ranchi

IN one of its kind initiative in the country, Gumla district administration is equipping all government buildings and public assets with QR codes so that one can get any information on their mobile phones about it by scanning the QR code put on the building.

According to officials, one can simply scan the QR code and rate the government building or can flag issues like poor maintenance or poor services being provided in the building.

Gumla Deputy Commissioner Karn Satyarthi came up with the concept of a digital district assets register, through which one can have access to any project being undertaken in their area by a single click on their computer.

Satyarthi informed that one can also record a 45 second video and upload his or her grievances which will then be resolved by the district administration. According to the Deputy Commissioner, the initiative will help them bring in transparency, make government departments as well as contractors more accountable, besides helping the district administration in planning future projects in a better fashion and also help them in detecting duplication in effort through different departments.

"All government buildings and public assets are being equipped with a QR code through which one can get all the details about it, the complete life history or lifecycle of that particular building, the exact cost estimate of the project, start and completion time, the contractor undertaking the project and photographs of the ongoing project. One can also rate the building giving it one to five stars on the basis of his or her experiences after visiting the place," said Satyarthi.

One can also record a 45 second video and register his or her complaint highlighting the shortcomings in the building or give positive feedback about it, he added.

Satyarthi said that the initiative will also help in getting information about the any building located in distant remote areas, whether it is not in use or it is getting dilapidated and about to collapse, so that action could be taken accordingly. It will help in maintaining transparency and monitoring the overruns projects, he said.

QR codes are also being installed on under-construction buildings so that their progress could be monitored. As of now, nearly 300 buildings have been covered with a target to install the codes in the next 2 months.

'Register complaint'

One can also record a 45 second video and register his or her complaint highlighting the shortcomings in the building or give positive feedback about it, he added. the initiative will also help in getting information about the any building located in distant remote areas, whether it is not in use or it is getting dilapidated and about to collapse, so that action could be taken accordingly. It will also monitor overrrun projects

NINE
members of the same family in Pakistan, a woman and her eight kids were killed after roof collapsed

GLOBAL WEATHER

LR: Light Rain **HR:** Heavy Rain **TDS:** Thundershower **LC:** Light Cloud **SNY:** Sunny

Beijing	29	16	SNY	Los Angeles	26	17	LC
Colombo	29	24	LC	Melbourne	25	12	HR
Dhaka	32	27	SNY	Moscow	21	8	HR
Dubai	39	31	SNY	New York	26	16	LC
Houston	31	23	SNY	Singapore	32	27	SNY
Istanbul	29	17	SNY	Toronto	19	11	LC
London	24	13	LC	Washington	27	14	SNY

A weekend of combat in Gaza kills 15 Israeli soldiers

War exacting heavy price on army but fight will continue, says Netanyahu

TEL AVIV

FIFTEEN Israeli soldiers have been killed in combat in Gaza over the weekend, the Israeli military said on Sunday, while tentative efforts continued on a deal for another exchange of hostages for Palestinians held by Israel.

The 15 Israeli soldiers killed on Friday and Saturday died in central and southern Gaza, a sign of how Hamas still puts up tough resistance even as Israel claims to have dealt the militant group a serious blow.

"The war exacts a very heavy price from us but we have no choice but to continue fighting," Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu said. "This is a difficult morning, after a very difficult day of fighting in Gaza. "Let it be clear: This will be a long war," Netanyahu added.

Meanwhile, the Israeli army indicated its forces were close to having operational control in north Gaza, after weeks of intense fighting.

Now, "we focus our efforts against Hamas in southern Gaza," military spokesman Jonathan Conricus said.

Fighting has raged in Khan Yunis, the birthplace of Yahya Sinwar, Hamas's leader in Gaza and the man Israel holds most responsible for the attack that sparked the war.

The Israeli army said it had attacked about 200 targets in Gaza over the past day.

Also, the head of the World Health Organization said on Sunday that the health system in Gaza was being destroyed and reiterated his call for a ceasefire. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus also hailed Gaza's medical workers who continue their work under increasingly dire circumstances.

"The decimation of the Gaza health system is a tragedy," he posted on X.

"We persist in calling for CeasefireNow. In the face of constant insecurity and inflows of wounded patients, we see doctors, nurses, ambulance drivers and more continue striving to save lives," he said.

The health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said on Sunday at least 20,424 people have been killed in the Palestinian territory since the start of the war.

The toll included 166 deaths in the past 24 hours, it said, and 54,036 people had been wounded. *Agencies*

Israeli soldiers carry the flag-draped casket of Staff Sgt. Birhanu Kassie during his funeral at Mt. Herzl military cemetery in Jerusalem on Sunday | AP

NIGHT WITHOUT LIGHTS

On Christmas Eve, Biblical birthplace of Jesus mirrors ghost town

BETHLEHEM

THE normally bustling Biblical birthplace of Jesus resembled a ghost town on Sunday, as Christmas Eve celebrations in Bethlehem were called off due to the Israel-Hamas war.

The festive lights and Christmas tree that normally decorate Manger Square were missing, as were the throngs of foreign tourists and jubilant youth marching bands that gather in the West Bank town each year to mark the holiday. Dozens of Palestinian security forces patrolled the empty square.

"This year, without the Christmas tree and without lights, there's just darkness," said Brother John Vinh, a Franciscan monk from Vietnam who has lived in Jerusalem for more than six years.

He said he always comes to Bethlehem to mark Christmas, but this year was especially sobering, as he gazed at a nativity scene in Manger Square with a baby Jesus wrapped in a white shroud, reminiscent of the thousands of children killed in the fighting in Gaza.

The cancellation of Christmas festivities is a severe blow to the town's economy. Tourism accounts for an estimated 70% of Bethlehem's income—almost all of that during the Christmas season.

A priest walks by Church of the Nativity, believed to be the birthplace of Jesus on Christmas Eve in Bethlehem | AP

With many major airlines cancelling flights to Israel, few foreigners are visiting. Local officials say over 70 hotels in Bethlehem have been forced to close, leaving thousands of people unemployed.

Gift shops were slow to open on Christmas Eve, although a few did once the rain had stopped pouring down. There were few visitors, however.

"We can't justify putting out a tree and celebrating as normal, when some people (in Gaza) don't even have houses to go to," said Ala'a Salameh, one of the owners of Afteem Restaurant. *AP*

Polish president says will veto state media subsidies

POLISH PRESIDENT ANDRZEJ DUDA ON SATURDAY SAID HE WOULD VETO STATE MEDIA SUBSIDIES PROPOSED IN A BUDGET-RELATED BILL AS PART OF A ROW OVER THE GOVERNMENT'S REFORM OF STATE MEDIA

FACING CRITICISM

Andrzej Duda had been criticised by some in the former ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party for not doing enough after after the Prime Minister Donald Tusk's government moved to sack the management of state media earlier this week

The move prompted a sit-in by PiS lawmakers in the offices of the state broadcaster, which had become a government mouthpiece during eight years of PiS rule that ended with parliamentary elections in October

There cannot be consent to this in view of the flagrant violation of the Constitution and the principles of a democratic state of law. Public media must first be repaired reliably and legally

Andrzej Duda,
Poland President

DUDA'S BILL

Duda said he would submit in the coming days his own bill, including other budget expenses such as pay rises for teachers, and asked for parliament to reconvene to adopt these proposals before the end of the year

ESCALATING STAND-OFF

The veto will escalate a growing stand-off between Duda, an ally of Poland's former ruling populists, and the new pro-EU government of PM Donald Tusk

President Andrzej Duda said that he would veto the bill that includes 3 billion zlotys ($762 million) for public media and would propose a bill of his own instead

Keep relatives away from corruption, cautions Xi

BEIJING

CHINESE President Xi Jinping has warned senior ruling Communist Party officials to maintain personal integrity, set strict rules for relatives to keep them away from corruption and refrain from blindly following foreign examples and reckless actions.

"Members of the Political Bureau of the CPC (Communist Party of China) Central Committee should exert rigorous requirements on themselves according to the standards of Marxist statesmen, setting an example in maintaining personal integrity and self-discipline for the whole Party," Xi said. "They must set strict rules for their family members, relatives, and staff workers around them when it comes to the efforts against corruption," Xi added.

The Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), the anti-corruption unit of the CPC, said corruption was becoming harder to detect and plans to extend the crackdown on extravagant government spending, especially during the Spring festival and Chinese New Year to be celebrated in February next year.

During the festival season, Chinese officials in the past were accused of accepting extravagant gifts for favours.

The CCDI said that in the first 10 months of the year, it investigated 80,000 violations of the anti-extravagance regulations and 1,14,238 people were placed under investigation.

Of those, 80,096 have faced party or administrative disciplinary action. *PTI*

KEEPING SPIRITS BRIGHT

People walk through the streets as they take part in Christmas Eve celebration in Lviv on Sunday amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine | AFP

Russian strikes kill four in Kherson over 24 hours

KYIV

RUSSIAN bombardment killed four persons and injured nine over 24 hours in the frontline southern Ukrainian city of Kherson, a regional official said on Sunday.

Russian forces fired 71 shells at Kherson from Saturday to Sunday morning, hitting the city centre, residential areas, medical and educational institutions and "critical infrastructure facilities," the region's governor Oleksandr Prokudin wrote on Telegram.

"As a result of Russian aggression, four people died and nine others were wounded, including one child."

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy condemned what he called "brutal terrorist shelling deliberately targeting life-sustaining civilian infrastructure and ordinary streets."

"Unfortunately, there are fatalities. My condolences to the families," the president added in a message on the social media platform.

Prokudin said an 87-year-old man and his 81-year-old wife were among the victims after an artillery shell hit a residential building. Rescuers found a third male victim under rubble, he added.

Zelenskyy said that repair teams would "work around the clock to restore electricity and heat supply" to the city after the strikes.

Separately, Ukraine's air force on Sunday said it had intercepted all but one of 15 drones launched by Russia overnight.

Ukraine recaptured Kherson following several months of Russian occupation in November last year. It is now a regular target for Moscow's forces based on the opposite bank of the Dnipro river, which became a natural front line as the conflict slowed to a war of attrition. *AFP*

EXPRESS READ

Cleverly under fire for joking on date rape drug

London: UK Home Secretary James Cleverly was under fire on Sunday for joking about date rape. Cleverly faced a call to step down after he reportedly joked at an event at the prime minister's home about drugging his wife. He said "a little bit of Rohypnol"—the so-called date rape drug—"in her drink every night" was "not really illegal if it's only a little bit."

Pak polls: Candidates file nomination papers

Islamabad: Hundreds of candidates aspiring to contest the February 8 general elections in Pakistan submitted their nomination papers, as the deadline to file their candidature for seats ended on Sunday. The nomination process started on December 20 and was initially set to be completed on Friday but the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) extended it for two days.

ASIA MATTERS

INDONESIA

GOVERNMENT DISTRIBUTES EL NINO AID

Indonesia's Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs Airlangga Hartarto said the government has been distributing El Nino aid in the form of direct cash assistance (BLT) during Nov-Dec. "Each family receives $13 of El Nino BLT per month. This year, the assistance is being distributed for two months, so each family is expected to receive $26 in total," he said on Sunday. The minister also said the government is aiming to distribute the cash aid to 18 million families. He also stressed that government had been taking measures for securing stocks of rice amid El Nino, *Antara* reported

MALAYSIA

AGENCY WARNS OF DANGER-LEVEL RAIN

The Malaysian Meteorological Department (MetMalaysia) issued danger-level continuous rain warning for several regions in Kelantan and Terengganu for Sunday and Monday. MetMalaysia said areas affected by rain in Kelantan are Tumpat, Pasir Mas, Kota Bharu, Jeli, Tanah Merah, Bachok, Machang, Pasir Puteh

THAILAND

27 TOURISTS RESCUED AFTER BOAT CAPSIZES

Twenty-seven foreign tourists were rescued from sea after their tourist boat capsized off Pattaya in Thailand on Saturday. The tourists were stranded about three nautical miles from a nearby island of Koh Larn. Rescuers brought the 27 Russian tourists and three crew members ashore. Most of them sustained injuries and signs of shock and distress due to the incident. They received preliminary medical treatment, before five tourists were transferred to hospitals, *The Strait Times* reported. The boat named Sea Beach was designed to accommodate 40 passengers

147 platoons across B'desh as oppn calls 12-hr block

DHAKA

A total of 147 platoons of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) were deployed across the country on Sunday to maintain law and order ahead of the January 7 elections as a 12-hour road, rail and waterways blockade called by opposition BNP and its allies demanding the resignation of Sheikh Hasina-led government is underway.

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and its mostly far-right allies allege that no election under the incumbent dispensation would be fair and demand the restoration of a non-party interim government for election oversight by amending the country's Constitution.

The blockade began at 6 am and will end at 6 pm, *Dhaka Tribune* newspaper reported. Of the 147 platoons deployed across the country, 16 teams are patrolling in Dhaka and adjoining districts, Shariful Islam, public relations officer at BGB, was quoted as saying by the newspaper.

This is the 12th such blockade called by the opposition parties since October 31, and the first since the announcement of BNP's non-cooperation movement against the government on December 20 during which the party urged people not to pay taxes and utility bills as part of the campaign.

In Dhaka, the BNP and its affiliate parties held separate protest rallies in support of the ongoing blockade and non-cooperation movement. *PTI*

Iran's navy adds smart homegrown cruise missiles to its arsenal

TEHRAN

IRAN'S navy on Sunday added domestically produced sophisticated cruise missiles to its arsenal, state TV reported.

The TV said both Talayieh and Nasir cruise missiles have arrived at a naval base near the Indian Ocean in the southern Iranian port of Konarak, some 1,400 kilometres southeast of the capital, Tehran. The long range Abu Mahdi Cruise missile has been renamed as Talayieh.

Navy chief Adm. Shahram Irani said the Talayieh has a range of more than 1,000 kilometres and called it "fully smart." Irani said the cruise missile is capable of changing targets during travel.

He said the Nasir has a range of 100 kilometres and can be installed on warships.

A ceremony was held for new equipment of the Iranian navy in which the Shahin kamikaze drone, which appears to now go by the name Sanjar was also delivered. A 6 canister launcher was mounted on the Mowj class frigate "Jamaran" for the first time. The drone has a range of 85 kilometres.

Nima 102 and 305 hexacopter UAVs meant to carry out short range low altitude patrol and intelligence from naval vessels were also delivered.

A missile system is displayed in a ceremony in Tehran on Sunday | AP

Last month, a container ship owned by an Israeli billionaire came under attack from a suspected Iranian drone in the Indian Ocean, as Israel wages war on Iran-backed Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

From time to time, Iran announces the test firing, production and commissioning of new military equipment that cannot be independently verified. The country says it has a stock of various kinds of missiles with ranges up to 2,000 kilometres, capable of reaching its archenemy Israel and United States bases in the region.

Meanwhile, Iran summoned Russia's charge d'affaires after Moscow and Arab countries released a joint statement earlier this week challenging Iran's claim to disputed islands in the Persian Gulf, state media reported on Sunday. *AP*

NICKEL PLANT

Furnace blast in Indonesia kills at least 13

PALU

A smelting furnace exploded on Sunday at a Chinese-owned nickel plant on Indonesia's Sulawesi island, killing at least 13 workers and injuring dozens of others, officials said.

It was the latest in a series of deadly incidents at nickel smelting plants in Indonesia that are part of China's Belt and Road Initiative.

At least four Chinese and nine Indonesian workers died when the furnace exploded while they were repairing it, said Central Sulawesi police chief Agus Nugroho.

The blast was so powerful that it demolished the furnace and damaged parts of the side walls of the building, said Nugroho, adding that about 46 workers were injured, including 14 Chinese nationals, some in critical condition.

Authorities are working to determine whether negligence by the company led to the deaths, Nugroho said.

The accident occurred at PT Indonesia Tsingshan Stainless Steel, a subsidiary of PT Indonesia Morowali Industrial Park, known as PT IMIP.

"We sincerely apologise for this incident and we are working closely with authorities to investigate what caused the accident," said company spokesperson Deddy Kurniawan. *AP*

₹9 lakh CR surge in asset base in 2023 as the mutual fund industry bounced back strongly this year.

Govt makes crucial changes in income tax return forms

New Income Tax Return forms, applicable for assessment year 2024-25, will have a new column for deductions allowed to Agniveers

DIPAK MONDAL @ New Delhi

THE Income tax department has introduced new Income Tax Return (ITR) Form 1 and ITR Form 4 for assessment year 2024-25.

These ITR forms will be applicable for filing returns in 2024-25 for the income earned during 2023-24.

Usually, the new ITR forms are notified by the I-T department in February and March, but this year the government has notified the changes much in advance. This should help taxpayers familiarise with new disclosures to be made and documents needed to be kept handy. We explain to you the changes (or no changes) made in the ITR forms for the new assessment year.

No Change in applicability

The applicability of ITR forms to different classes of taxpayers remains unchanged. ITR Form 1 will be applicable to salaried individuals with income (or loss) from one house property, family pension etc.

ITR Form is applicable to salaried individuals with other sources of income like capital gains from investments, dividend income, income (or loss) from more than one house properties, etc. Salaried individuals with other sources of income like income from presumptive businesses, partnership firms, etc can use ITR 3 and ITR 4.

Deduction for Agniveers

The Budget 2023 had added a new section – Section 80CCH -- to the Income Tax Act.

As per the Section 80CCH, the entire amount contributed by applicants and the Central Government to the Agniveer Corpus Fund is applicable for tax deductions. ITR 1 and ITR 4 have been amended to include a column for furnishing details of deduction amount allowed under this section.

Disclosure for type of account

A new disclosure to specify the type of bank account has been added in the new ITR-4 form. The assessee will have to disclose details of all bank accounts held in India at any time during the previous year (excluding dormant accounts).

Receipts in cash disclosure

A new disclosure to specify the receipts in cash has been added in the new ITR-4 Form. Earlier, no specific column for cash was there, now a specific column has been separated from any other mode, such as Cryptocurrency etc.

According to Om Rajpurohit, joint partner (Corporate & International Tax) with AMRG & Associate, in the past, all receipts—aside from bank accounts—were disclosed collectively. "Now, the business receipt, which might be in the form of exchange, cryptocurrency, amenities, etc., cannot be combined with cash because of this distinct column for cash receipts. Although, it's unclear how this separate disclosure of cash receipt will be used in the future even when the taxpayer is opting for the presumed tax regime," he said.

New tax regime default option

The Budget 2023 made the new tax regime the default tax regime. When the taxpayers go to the income tax portal to file their returns, they see the new tax scheme as a default option. In case they want to file their return under the old regime, they will have to opt for it.

According to tax advisory and services firm Taxman, Section 115BAC (6) allows eligible assesses to opt out of the new tax regime. To exercise this option an assessee with income other than from business and profession must indicate his choice of tax regime in the return form. But for an assessee with income from business or profession must exercise this option in Form 10-IEA on or before the due date of filing returns.

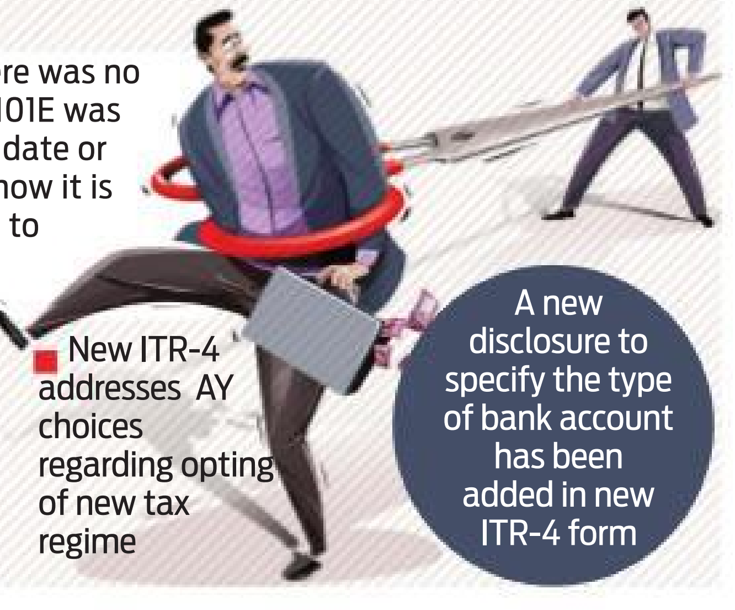
In the earlier ITR-4 form, there was no disclosure whether 10IEA was filed within the due date or after the due date, now it is specifically required to disclose. The new ITR 1 and ITR 4 forms have been amended to include these changes.

ITR changes made last year

The changes in ITR forms made last year increased disclosures for taxpayers. Individuals and HUF having business or professional income were required to provide more information regarding opt in and opt out of the new tax regime. Such individuals or HUF were told to make specific disclosures regarding advances from related parties. Some of the changes were basically to plug the gaps that were there in the earlier forms.

For instance, separate schedules for set-off of current year capital losses against current year capital gains income were added for salaried individuals using ITR-2. Specific schedules were made in the returns for disclosing income from Virtual Digital Assets (VDA) such as cryptocurrencies for which a special tax regime was introduced in last year's budget. The schedule relating to VDA made the intent and interpretation clear that loss suffered on a particular VDA would not be allowed to be offset against the gain from other VDAs.

CHANGES IN ITR-1 AND ITR-4



- As per the Section 80CCH, the entire amount contributed by applicants to the Agniveer Corpus Fund is applicable for tax deductions
- Salaried individuals with other sources of income like income from presumptive businesses, partnership firms, etc can use ITR 3 and ITR 4
- In earlier form there was no disclosure whether 101E was filed within the due date or after the due date, now it is specifically required to disclose
- The Budget 2023 had added a new section – Section 80CCH -- to the Income Tax Act
- New ITR-4 addresses AY choices regarding opting of new tax regime

A new disclosure to specify the type of bank account has been added in new ITR-4 form

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MONEY MATTERS

RESOLVE TO KNOW MORE IN THE NEW YEAR

FINANCIAL KNOWLEDGE

RAJAS KELKAR

(The author is editor-in-chief at www.moneyminute.in)

THE year ends on a note of euphoria for financial markets. Signals of high equity prices, reasonable inflation outlook, and strong growth prospects mean expectations are sky-high for 2024. Prospects for your money are closely linked to these expectations. If you are new to the world of investments, learning to connect the dots is an important skill.

In an era of information overload, 'not aware of anything' cannot be an excuse. As you take stock of the year and look forward to ringing in the New Year, you must resolve to move forward on the knowledge aspect. A lot of us are emotional when it comes to money and investing. However, you must start getting 'less' emotional and 'more' rational. Your financial decisions cannot be based on 'hearsay', 'uncle says so' or any other impulse. They have to be based on knowledge.

The Reserve Bank of India releases a wealth of information through the RBI Monthly Bulletin. In addition to that, every two months, the RBI releases monetary policy-related documents. An important one is the Minutes of the Monetary Policy Committee Meeting. The view of the committee members on the inflation and growth outlook can indicate the direction your money will likely take over the next year.

The latest bulletin compiles the Monetary Policy documents, speeches given by the RBI governor and deputy governors at public events and articles written by the RBI staff or experts. The monetary policy documents give you a sense of the outlook for inflation and economic growth over the next year. Speeches talk on various topics, from the state of the economy to a review of financial market regulations. Among the articles published, an important one is on the state of the economy.

It is a commentary on the economy based on some serious data set. In the latest minutes of the monetary policy committee, RBI governor Shaktikanta Das and other members of the monetary committee have flagged concerns about rising food inflation. Persistently high food prices hurt the process of bringing down the overall inflation rate in the economy.

To make sense of these documents, you need to start reading them regularly. If you do not belong to the world of finance, it would be tough to do so. However, for the sake of your finances, you need to make a beginning somewhere. To that end, you need to choose a good professional financial advisor. They are trained to help you with financial planning. It helps you define your financial goals and align your asset allocation. Your financial advisor may meet you personally once or twice a year.

You must make these conversations meaningful. Reading the RBI documents on the state of the economy and the impact of the future inflation and growth outlook on your money could help. You can ask your advisor pertinent questions and make the most of the time.

SOURAV ROY

To your advantage, you live in a country with the fastest-growing large economy globally. In 2023, foreign portfolio investors came back to buy Indian equities, and it is one of the best-performing stock markets in the world. Indian companies are relentlessly delivering on their promise of superior profit growth. That will keep all categories of investors interested in the Indian market.

Although domestic mutual funds have grown significantly in size and pump in over $2 billion a month in Indian equities, the Indian population, by and large, is immune to movements in the stock market. They do not have direct or indirect exposure to equity assets. Most of the Indians focus on real estate and gold for investing. Such a situation in a growing economy should be treated as good news. There is potential for financial services across the board to grow. These include banking, stockbroking services, mutual funds and insurance products.

This column has always maintained the importance of knowledge to your finances. However, you need a Sebi-registered professional advisor to use that information and put it to work. Think of yourself as a player and the advisor as your coach. You may know a lot or be the first among equals. However, you still need a coach.

MONEY-WISE

STRATEGIES POST NEW INDEX HIGHS

FINANCIAL ADVICE

ASHOK KUMAR

Head of LKW-India.
He can be reached at
ceolotus@hotmail.com
(Views expressed here are personal)

HDFCBANK +7.7%

THE BSE Sensex crossed the 70,000 points mark recently. Such milestones are 'celebrated' by the financial media, especially our 'over the top' electronic media, and it invariably sparks a debate on whether a huge correction or even a crash is round the corner.

If I look back at the journey of the BSE Sensex since the late 1980s, it stood at 510 points in January 1987 and then soared to a new high of 4285 points by January 1992 before dropping to 1991 points within a year in January 1993.

The BSE Sensex then soared once again to 5887 points at the turn of the century in January 2000 before literally halving to 2924 points in January 2003. From a point where all seemed lost, we witnessed a huge secular bull run over the next five years that took the index to 20,873 points in January 2008.

The index once again slipped sharply to 8674 points within a year in January 2009 before making a fresh outbreak in late 2013 to end up at another new high of 28,233 points in January 2016. At the turn of the decade in January 2020, the BSE Sensex was once again riding a new high at 42,273 points before the Covid pandemic brought it down to its knees at 25,638 points in March 2020. In just 18 months thereafter, the same index touched the 60,000 points mark, reflecting a breathtaking 30,000 plus points uptick in the short span of 18 months. Almost inevitably, it paused for a fair while traversing to and fro between 55,000 and 60,000 points before a recent take-off took it past the 70,000 points mark.

Clearly, there is enough anecdotal evidence to suggest that there is immense merit in staying invested over really long time frames. However, since investing is an art and not a science, there is no single 'correct' strategy that can be deployed at all given points in time and even more so, to approach a raging bull market and fears of a deep correction or crash.

A lot depends on the life-cycle stage of the investor and their near-term goals and objectives. While staying put may be the optimal strategy for those with a longer term horizon for their investment goals and objectives, the same may not be true for someone with nearer term investment goals and objectives. Such a person, and more so, if the goal set has been achieved or nearly achieved should actually be thinking of booking at least partial profits to divert the requisite money off the table.

Similarly, one must also have the discipline to shut out loud external 'noises', in this case those who are perpetual doomsday predictors as well as those with irrational exuberance talking of the Sensex being poised for a one way take-off sans any hiccups en route.

So, for all the opinions one reads (including those of yours truly), one must remember and I re-iterate -- investing is an art and not a science. Hence, there is no 'single correct' strategy, at any given point in time. To each, her or his own.

Lenders approve Adani Power offer for Chennai-based Coastal Energen

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ Chennai

THE Committee of Creditors of Chennai-based power generation firm Coastal Energen has approved the resolution plan submitted by the Adani Power-led consortium, the latter informed the exchanges on Sunday.

"In this regard, the consortium of APL (Adani Power Ltd) has received a Letter of Intent (LOI) from the Resolution Professional (RP) on 23 December 2023. The implementation of the resolution plan is subject to the terms of the LOI and requisite approvals from the NCLT and / or any other regulatory authority / courts / tribunal (as the case may be) under applicable laws," Adani Power said in a regulatory filing.

Coastal Energen Pvt Ltd, the power generating flagship company of the Coal and Oil Group, was to set up a 1200 MW coal fired thermal power plant in the district of Tuticorin in Tamil Nadu. A consortium of banks led by State Bank of India had provided loans to Coastal Energen to set up the thermal power project in Thoothukudi. However, due to delays and cost overruns, the project cost shot up from ₹4,297 crore to ₹ 7,870 crore. This led to financial difficulties for the company, and it was unable to service its obligations to the lenders.

In February 2022, the Chennai Bench of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), admitted the insolvency application filed by SBI against Coastal Energen.

Creditors of the Chennai-based company had submitted claims of over ₹12,000 crore. Though the details of the resolution plan submitted by Adani Power is not known publicly, it has been reported that the consortium has offered around ₹3,500 crore to the creditors of the company.

Vedanta, Torrent Power, Jindal Power, and Dickey Alternative Investment Fund were also in the race to acquire the company. In October this year, promoters of the company -- Mutiara & Precious Energy Holdings – had offered to pay a total of ₹5,847 crore, including 15% ownership of the company, to its lenders to settle its debts.

Nagarjuna Fertilizers to pursue OTS with ARC

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ New Delhi

THE board of debt-ridden Nagarjuna Fertilizers and Chemicals Ltd. (NFCL) in a meeting held on Sunday, authorised the company to engage with Asset Care and Reconstruction Enterprise Limited (ACRE) on a potential One-Time Settlement (OTS) under the SARFAESI framework, directly, or through a combination of both approaches.

This parallel track aims to achieve an amicable resolution alongside the ongoing efforts to facilitate the planned slump sale. "NFCL remains committed to working towards a sustainable debt resolution plan," the company said.

"We are actively engaged with ACRE and optimistic about fulfilling the critical conditions for the slump sale transaction. The additional OTS exploration under SARFAESI reflects our proactive approach to ensure a comprehensive and timely resolution for all stakeholders," the company added in an exchange filing on Sunday.

The board in its earlier meeting in September had approved slump sale of Ammonia/Urea and MI businesses with related assets and liabilities (subject to meeting of certain conditions), sale of non-core assets and OTS as debt resolution with ACRE with the funds raised from slump sale and sale of non-core assets was subject to fulfilment of CPs, approval of Lender/ ACRE and other applicable approvals and clearances, the company added.

However, ACRE deems the current settlement proposal "tentative" and not binding upon the successful completion of the aforementioned conditions.

This effectively puts the debt resolution plan on hold for now.

Meanwhile, ACRE continues its pursuit of alternative debt recovery measures under the SARFAESI Act.

In May 2023, the agency issued a notice and subsequently took symbolic possession of NFCL's scheduled assets in October.

NFCL proposes a one-time settlement of ₹1,500 crore with asset reconstruction company ACRE. According to the annual report of the company, out of the ₹1,500 crore, the company plans to raise ₹1200 crore through slump sale proceeds, and the balance ₹300 crore from the proceeds of sale of non-core assets to the extent required and approved by lenders and/ or or from receipts in case of exercise of call option for 19.7 % equity owned by NFCL in AM Green Ammonia (India) Private Limited from the Slump sale transaction.

The company also plans to use the balance cash/non-core assets towards running the company, settlement of remaining creditors, tax liabilities, future business plan etc.

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS
SPORT

Khawaja denied permit to have peace symbol on bat

Australia's Usman Khawaja has been denied permission to place a peace symbol on his bat and shoes for the Boxing Day Test against Pakistan, reports said Sunday. A sticker showing a black dove and the words 01:UDHR — a reference to Article One of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — was on his bat and shoes during training on Sunday.

Newly-elected WFI pinned down; sr vice-president in focus

Sports ministry asks Sanjay Singh-led body to abstain from managing day-to-day affairs of federation; IOA to form ad-hoc committee once again

It is the first step towards something good happening. I hope the government understands more the cause we were fighting for. If a woman federation president is there, it will be better for the safety of women wrestlers. It was a fight for sisters and daughters of the country —Sakshi Malik

I served wrestling for 12 years, good or bad only time will tell. I have taken retirement from wrestling. I am breaking my relationship with the sport. Now whatever decision has to be taken, whether to liaise with the government or handling the legal processes, those decisions will be taken by the elected members. The Lok Sabha elections are round the corner and I have to move ahead —Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh

Now that I have returned it (Padma Shri), I am not going to take it back. The honour of our sisters and daughters is bigger than any award. All of you have seen what is happening. I will think about taking it back only after justice is delivered. The matter is in court and we are waiting for justice —Bajrang Punia

We are seeking time from the sports minister and will request him that the suspension be lifted. We will explain that we have followed rules in taking decisions. Whatever decisions were taken, were taken by consensus —Sanjay Singh

FIROZ MIRZA @Chennai

ARTICLE X of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI), which specifies the duties of the office-bearers, holds the key as the government and other stakeholders scurry to find an amicable solution to resolve ongoing issues in wrestling in the country.

Part 'b' of the article deals with the duties of the senior vice-president and it says, "In the absence of the President, the Senior Vice President shall perform all the duties of the President. This function shall be delegated to the Senior Vice President in writing. In addition, Senior Vice President shall perform all such duties which are specifically assigned to him in writing by the President."

As senior vice president, Devender Kadyan, is one of the two candidates backed by the protesting wrestlers in the newly-elected WFI panel and his elevation to the top post can bring an end to the dispute that has marred the sport in the country for almost a year. But for that to happen, the two factions including wrestlers Bajrang Punia, Sakshi Malik and Vinesh Phogat have to come to a consensus.

With the sports ministry on Sunday instructing the newly-elected executive committee of the WFI to abstain from administering and managing the day-to-day affairs of the federation with immediate effect until further orders, the sport was thrown into further disarray with the only option left is to find a candidate acceptable to both the parties.

In its order, the ministry cited WFI's 'hasty announcement' of organising the U-15 and U-20 nationals 'without following due procedure and not giving sufficient notice to wrestlers for preparations. It should be noted here that the elections were held only on Thursday with former president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh's close loyalist Sanjay Kumar Singh winning the contest for the top post, defeating former Commonwealth Games gold medallist Anita Sheoran 40-7.

Soon after coming to power, the Sanjay Singh-led body cancelled all the decisions made by the ad-hoc committee including the senior national championships allotted to the Railway Sports Promotion Board and Olympic qualification criteria. It also announced that the U-15 and U-20 national championships will be held in Gonda, Uttar Pradesh, the home turf of Brij Bhushan, from December 28 to 30. Secretary Prem Chand Lochab raised objections to the move and wrote to Sanjay Singh and the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) saying the decisions were made in contradiction to the WFI constitution. It was learnt that the ministry also wrote to the WFI chief asking his reply on the issue and decided to take the latest step after not getting a satisfactory reply from him.

The ministry has also written to the IOA president and asked her to form an ad-hoc committee to run the sport in the country. Notably, the federation was under an ad-hoc committee constituted on May 3 this year till the elections were held on December 21. "Since wrestling is an Olympic sport and WFI is an affiliate member of the Indian Olympic Association and taking note of the compelling current situation arising out of the influence and control of the WFI's former office bearers, serious concerns have arisen about the governance and integrity of the WFI," said the letter written to the IOA president.

"This requires for immediate and stringent corrective measures to uphold the principles of good governance in sports organisation, and thus, now it becomes incumbent on the part of IOA to make suitable arrangements for the interim period for managing the affairs of WFI so that sportspersons of wrestling disciplines do not suffer in any manner and the principle of good governance in the sports body do not get jeopardise. In view of the above, it is requested that an ad-hoc committee may be constituted by the IOA to manage and control the affairs of WFI, as per the defined role of NSFs in the National Sports Development Code of India 2011, including the selection of athletes, making entries for the participation of sportspersons in international events, holding of sporting activities, etc with immediate effect, until further orders," added the letter.

Sakshi says it's good

Sakshi, who was the face of protest and announced her retirement from the sport after Brij Bhushan's faction won 13 out of 15 posts, welcomed the move and said, "It is the first step towards something good happening. I hope the government understands more the cause we were fighting for. If a woman federation president is there, it will be better for the safety of women wrestlers. It was a fight for sisters and daughters of the country."

Bajrang, who had returned his Padma Shri in protest on Friday, affirmed that he will not roll back his decision until complete justice is done. "Now that I have returned it, I am not going to take it back. The honour of our sisters and daughters is bigger than any award. All of you have seen what is happening. I will think about taking it back only after justice is delivered. The matter is in court and we are waiting for justice," he told a news agency. Meanwhile, Brij Bhushan, a BJP member of parliament, met the party's national president JP Nadda after the ministry's decision. He later told the media that he has distanced himself from the sport and will now focus on the 2024 elections.

India's double success affirms need for more Test matches

KALYANI MANGALE @Mumbai

Indian players thank the crowd at Wankhede after beating Australia | SPORTZPICS

IN the leadup to the India-Australia Test, it was made clear that there were no points allotted for this match like there are in the Ashes. Australia even brought the multi-format trophy they won in 2021, only to realise later that no points were to be shared. There were no Test championship points at stake in Mumbai. Like the Test against England in Navi Mumbai, this was a one-off Test against the side that plays the longest format fairly regularly.

Even before the fixture started, only one of the sides knew when and where their next Test would be. And none of it mattered when India's vice-captain Smriti Mandhana lofted Jess Jonassen over her head to seal a famous victory against Australia by eight wickets at Wankhede Stadium on Sunday.

This win, the first-ever against Australia, second on home soil in two weeks after a drought of nine years, comes at a time with a new coach taking over the reins after a long time of uncertainty. After the white-ball series loss against England, the two back-to-back Tests marked the return of the longest format since 2014. India's last Test wins came in the same year. Even if you want to check the highlights of India's wins from that year, you can only find a grainy vision of the Wormsley Test against England when the Mithali Raj-led side beat England with eight debutants. There are not many photos available from the win against South Africa in Mysore, the footage is a distant dream. However, now, the world saw India dominate the format. For a team that was asked to win more matches, if they wanted any major changes in the way they function, these two Tests have laid a foundation for more Tests to come. Even players want more of these Tests despite their tired bodies need some rest. "We are fully recovered (laughs). When you see the results after so many days of hard work, you've been preparing for it for 15 days, so when you get the result the body recovers by itself," Sneh Rana, the Player of the Match for her seven wickets in the match, said.

"It is always an amazing feeling when you contribute something to the team. This feeling is hard to describe in words. I feel good. They are very important because Test matches (for women) are happening in India after a long time. Test matches hold a lot of significance for people. We are fortunate that we got to play two back-to-back Tests, that too in home conditions. I'm hopeful that we get more Test matches going forward and it will be good not just for us but also for the girls who will play for the country in the future," she added.

Alyssa Healy, Australia's captain echoed similar sentiments. "Standing there at the presentation, when Anjum Chopra asked me a question, I said 'yup, imagine playing two more of these'. That would be an unbelievable experience for our group and probably a true test of both side's abilities. In a one-off Test [with] India playing in their home conditions, you'd expect them to be heavy favourites. We'd love to see more and more, and it would create a real contest in three games," she said.

Since 2017, there have been only two teams, England and Australia, that have gathered all the silverware there is to win. In recent times, Australia have been the team that has stood between the Indian side and the ultimate glory. Whether it was the 2020 T20 World Cup in front of the full Melbourne Cricket Ground or the gold medal match at the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham in 2022. For India to beat the side that has hardly seen any significant loss in such a remarkable fashion makes it a sweeter victory.

Brief scores: Australia 219 & 261 (Tahlia 73; Sneh 4/63) **lost to** India 406 & 75/2 in 18.4 ovs (Mandhana 38 n.o).

Full story: newindianexpress.com

On cloud nine: Sneh delivers yet again for India

KALYANI MANGALE @Mumbai

Sneh Rana finished with a haul of seven wickets against Australia | SPORTZPICS

WHEN Sneh Rana came to bat in the second innings of the Test against England at the County Ground in Bristol, India were holding on to a slim lead after being asked to follow on by Heather Knight. Soon, she lost two batting partners — Harmanpreet Kaur and Shikha Pandey.

Wicketkeeper Taniya Bhatia by her side, she was the last recognised batter in the line-up with a responsibility to save the match for her team on her Test debut. And she nailed her job with 80 runs off 154 balls and an unbeaten partnership of 104 runs took the game away from the hosts. It didn't win India a match, but it was a riveting display of character. Rana, on her debut, was a hero.

Since then, Rana had to wait for her chance in the format. When India played a pink-ball Test against Australia, Rana was not part of the playing XI. She had to wait till 2023 and once she got a chance, she took it with both hands. She took nine wickets in two matches, helping India beat England and Australia at home in a span of a few days. "When you are referring to 2021, which was my comeback, obviously it was a good feeling for me because it was my debut match. We couldn't win it (against England), it ended in a draw. But our girls fought well. But if you talk about it now, we first beat England and then Australia. They are the two best teams in the world and we competed against them and defeated them by good margins. So it is an amazing feeling and I'm hopeful that we get to play more days cricket in the future," Rana said after India's win over Australia.

Rana took seven wickets in the match, including that of Australian vice-captain Tahlia McGrath in the first innings, and broke the crucial partnership with McGrath and Ellyse Perry in the second innings. "We have played red-ball cricket earlier, our domestic tournaments are played with the red ball (the inter zonal multi-day tournament was last played in 2017-18). It's just a change of ball, a change of colour. Barring that, your skills remain the same, you don't need to change much. The preparations were very simple. There was no need to experiment because red-ball cricket is a long game. So we kept it simple and remained calm. As far as my bowling is concerned, my preparations have always been around bowling the right channels and backing my strengths. I didn't do any experiments," she added.

Even with her personal success, Rana was all praise for the youngsters. "If I speak about Shubha (Satheesh) when she debuted against England, it was amazing the way she handled the pressure. Unfortunately, she couldn't play this match due to an injury. But I hope she continues to contribute to India in the coming times."

Rana was a hero on her debut, and again in Mumbai.

Full story: newindianexpress.com

Chirag wins natl badminton title

AGENCIES @Guwahati

CHIRAG SEN clinched the men's singles title while Anmol Kharb won the women's singles crown at the National Badminton Championships here on Sunday. The 25-year-old Chirag, who had beaten second seed Kiran George in the semifinal on Saturday, was engaged in a tough contest against fourth seeded Tharun M.

While Chirag took the opening game 21-14, he lost the second 13-21 before bouncing back to win the decider 21-9.

In women's singles, Anmol was up against Tanvi Sharma in the final. Anmol won 15-21, 21-17, 16-8.

EXPRESS READ

Karan, Divya emerge winners in pistol trials

NEW DELHI: Karan Sehrawat of Haryana and Divya TS of Karnataka emerged victorious at the men's and women's 10m air pistol trials (T2) here on Sunday, concluding the new season's first two national selection trials for rifle and pistol. Olympian Saurabh Chaudhary extended his good run to a second day, topping the men's 10m air pistol T2 qualifications with a score of 586.

Manan, Vijay enter Masters snooker semis

CHENNAI: Manan Chandra and Vijay Nichani on Sunday entered the semifinals of the Masters Snooker at the National Championships. Chandra, who began the day with a 4-0 win over Anurag Bagri in the pre-quarterfinal, registered a 4-2 victory over Mahesh Jagdale in the quarterfinal. Nichani too had a great start, winning 4-1 against Subrat Das in the pre-quarterfinal.

Boxing nationals: Jaismine, Arundhati advance

GREATER NOIDA: 2022 Commonwealth Games bronze medallist Jaismine (60kg) and former youth world champion Arundhati Choudhary (66kg) registered victories on the third day to enter the quarterfinals of the onging national boxing championships in Greater Noida. Jaismine secured a commanding 5-0 victory over Thongam Kunjarani Devi of Manipur while Arundhati beat Amita of All India Police 5-0.

Chelsea suffer Xmas misery

AGENCIES @Wolverhampton

WOLVES condemned Chelsea to a fourth defeat in six league matches on Sunday, winning 2-1 in the first Christmas Eve Premier League match since 1995.

Mauricio Pochettino's men dominated possession at Molineux but wasted chances in an incident-packed game littered with careless defensive errors by the visiting side.

Late on Saturday, Arsenal held title rivals Liverpool to a pulsating 1-1 draw at Anfield. The result meant Arsenal will spend Christmas Day on top of the Premier League. Liverpool are a point behind at second.

Odisha Juggernauts beat Rajasthan Warriors 35-27 on Sunday | DEBADATTA MALLICK

Odisha Juggernauts off to happy start

CUTTACK: Defending champions Odisha Juggernauts began the Ultimate Kho Kho Season 2 with a commanding 35-27 victory over Rajasthan Warriors at the Jawaharlal Nehru Indoor Stadium in Cuttack on Sunday.Akshay Masal contributed to the Odisha Juggernauts' win by scoring 8 points. The much-awaited second season of Ultimate Kho Kho was inaugurated in the presence of Tenzing Niyogi (CEO & League Commissioner, Ultimate Kho Kho), Sudhanshu Mittal (Kho Kho Federation of India president), Tusharkanti Behera (Odisha sports minister) and Indian women's kho kho team captain Nasreen Shaikh.

Head coach Dravid backs Rahul's ability to keep in Tests

GOMESH S @Chennai

India captain Rohit Sharma (L), KL Rahul (C) & head coach Rahul Dravid | PTI

THE last time KL Rahul stepped onto the SuperSport Park in Centurion to play in a Test in 2021, it turned out to be match to remember for him and the Indian team. The opener scored a splendid century as India beat South Africa by 113 runs to take a 1-0 lead in the three-match series. Days after that Test, Rahul was thrown into the deep end as he had to lead the country in the next match as then captain Virat Kohli missed the game due to a back spasm.

While it is the highest honour for any cricketer, the crown came with a burden. Rahul scored a fifty in the first innings, but India lost the match and the momentum. Kohli was back for the third Test, but the hosts, led by Dean Elgar, piled on, securing a come-from-behind series win in Cape Town.

Two years on, he is back in Centurion, and this time, too, there is a massive challenge in front of him as India are getting ready for the boxing day Test in Centurion. Rahul is not an opener anymore. Neither is Shubman Gill. Yashasvi Jaiswal is expected to take guard with Rohit Sharma at the other end. If Rahul plays, it will be as a middle-order batter who keeps wickets. In ODIs, the Karnataka batter has made the No. 5 slot his own and has kept wickets in Rishabh Pant's absence.

However, doing the same in the longest format is a different ball-game. He will have to keep wickets through 90 overs of play, come back the next day and do it all over again. India do have KS Bharat in the squad, whose glovework is a thing of a beauty in itself.

And yet, what tilts the balance in Rahul's favour is his ability with the bat. Although he has batted only once in the middle-order, on his debut, Rahul has shown that he is capable of adapting. And with the team management looking for batting depth, Rahul's chances of playing seems better than ever.

In fact, head coach Rahul Dravid called it an exciting challenge, before adding that his namesake is keen on taking it up. "With Ishan (Kishan) not being available this opportunity came up, we had a couple of keepers to choose from and Rahul is one of them. We had discussed with him and he was very confident and was keen on giving it a go," Dravid said on Sunday.

"We do understand it is not something he has done as often (keeping in Tests). But he has been doing it regularly in 50-overs cricket and that takes a lot out of your body. He has prepared well over the last five to six months, he has done a lot of keeping, even though it is in white-ball format, but this will be an exciting challenge for him. I guess one of the things is there's not going to be that much spin bowling, so that will ease him into the role a little bit, something how it goes and pans out. It's really nice to have him for the option he provides us. His ability with the bat will be useful and he has kept in white ball cricket and the question is of transforming that into red ball cricket," the head coach added.

A lot has changed for Rahul since the last time he played a Centurion Test. Should he play on Tuesday, the one thing he would hope for is to have the same kind of luck he had last time around.

UPCOMING EXAMINATIONS Finish Line 2023

CSIR NET 2023 EXAM	XAT EXAM	OPSC SO EXAM
Date: December 26, 27 & 28, 2023	Date: January 7, 2024	Date: December 31, 2023

What are the most significant events in the education sector which got the nation talking? **Karthikeya S** takes a look at some of them

FLASHBACK IN EDUCATION

23 Turning Points of 2023

We are accused of saffronising education. But then what is wrong with saffron? — M Venkaiah Naidu, Former Vice-President of India

1 TEXTBOOK RATIONALISATION

THE 'rationalisation' of National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) textbooks was a much talked about issue. The NCERT revised its textbooks from Classes VI to X for the academic year 2023-24 to ensure no overlap of topics. However, the deletions from the history textbooks led to controversy as topics omitted were the history of Mughal courts, the 2002 Gujarat riots, the Emergency, mention of Dalit writers, the Naxalite movement, Industrial Revolution, and Gandhi's contribution to communal harmony.

Student suicides rose by 70%

2 STUDENT SUICIDES PEAK AT PREMIER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

IN one of the most tragic developments this year, NCRB data reported that the rate of student suicides in India rose by 70%. Rajasthan's Kota, popularly known as the 'Coaching capital of India', recorded an average of three suicides per month in the first eight months of 2023. Premier institutes like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) also reported several cases of suicide – many of them from the SC/ST community. Reflecting on this, Dr Soumitra Pathare, Director of Centre for Mental Health Law and Policy, says, "The missing element is the education sector's head-in-the-sand approach to it and unwillingness to address it as a systemic issue, rather than as an individual and personal issue."

3 G20 SUMMIT & INVOLVEMENT OF EDUCATION MINISTRY

INDIA'S presidency at the G20 Summit this year made headlines, and had everyone looking forward to the outcomes. Naturally, education was one of the priority areas of discussion at the G20 Summit 2023, and in the months leading to the summit, the G20 Education Ministers met four times in Chennai, Amritsar, Bhubaneswar, and Pune. This Working Group emphasised areas like ensuring foundational literacy and numeracy in the context of blended learning, making tech-enabled learning more inclusive plus, strengthening research and fostering innovation.

ALLOW US TRANSFER
WE CAN NOT STUDY WELL IN WAR ZONE
OUR LIFE NOT SAFE IN UKRAINE

4 INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND VISA WOES AMIDST GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS

AMID diplomatic tensions between India and Canada, there was tension among Indian students in Canada about their future. Meanwhile, the 2021 batch of Foreign Medical Graduates (FMGs), who returned to India from Ukraine, were unable to continue their education in "safer" countries due to the National Medical Commission (NMC) guidelines. After protests, the NMC announced a three-month academic mobility programme on November 22 for FMGs to transfer to other countries and finish their course.

5 NEP 2023 - IMPLEMENTATION AND TRANSFORMATION

IN 2020, the National Education Policy (NEP) was introduced by the Government of India and its impact materialised in the academic year 2023-24. Recognised as a transformative force, this policy envisions a comprehensive overhaul of the Indian education system by 2030. NEP 2023 introduced sweeping reforms in higher education, emphasising flexibility, transitioning from exam-centric to holistic learning, offering clear entry/exit options, synchronising vocational subjects, and facilitating the portability of academic credits to enable more mobility.

DU STUDENT BODY

President: Tushar Dedha, ABVP

Vice-President: Abhi Dahiya, NSUI

Secretary: Aprajita, ABVP

Joint Secretary: Sachin Baisla, ABVP

6 DUSU ELECTIONS FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE COVID-19

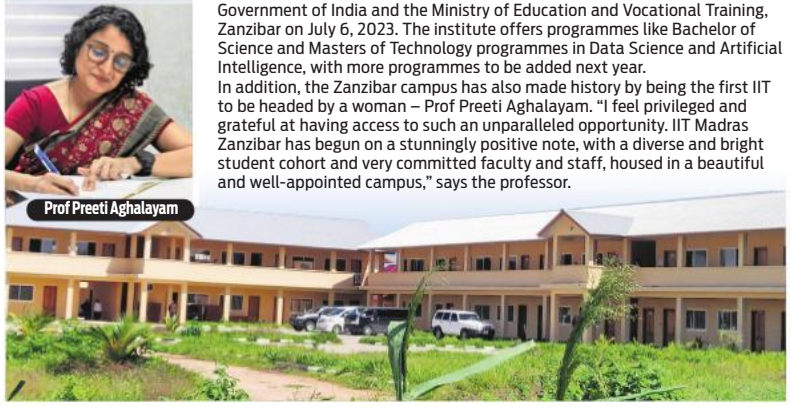
AFTER a gap of three years, the elections to the Delhi University Student Union (DUSU) were held this year on September 22. This year, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad's (ABVP) Tushar Dedha, Aparajita and Sachin Baisla secured the posts of the DUSU President, Secretary and Joint Secretary, respectively, while National Students' Union of India's (NSUI) Abhi Dahiya bagged the Vice-President's post. The voter turnout for the DUSU elections was 42 per cent. As per Prof Chander Shekhar, Chief of Elections at DU, this gap in conducting elections was due to COVID-19 and lockdowns. "It was important that we conducted the DUSU elections this year after a huge gap, as student politics keep campus democracy alive," he says.

7 EXAM PAPER LEAKS

Amogha Arnava Viva, TSPSC aspirant

THE news of the Telangana State Public Service Commission (TSPSC) exam paper leak and the cancellation of the exams came as a blow to the TSPSC aspirants and unemployed youth of the state at large. "This whole ordeal has incentivised many to give up on public service commission examinations," says Amogha Arnava Viva, a TSPSC aspirant. Other paper leaks which were controversial are that of Assam High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) exam, Maharastra Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) exam and Rajasthan Eligibility Exam for Teachers (REET).

8 IIT MADRAS OVERSEAS CAMPUS



Prof Preeti Aghalayam

IN a first for any Indian public higher educational institute, an overseas campus of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras was inaugurated on November 6. Located in the autonomous region of Zanzibar, Tanzania, this campus was the result of an MoU signed between the Ministry of Education, Government of India and the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, Zanzibar on July 6, 2023. The institute offers programmes like Bachelor of Science and Masters of Technology programmes in Data Science and Artificial Intelligence, with more programmes to be added next year.

In addition, the Zanzibar campus has also made history by being the first IIT to be headed by a woman – Prof Preeti Aghalayam. "I feel privileged and grateful at having access to such an unparalleled opportunity. IIT Madras Zanzibar has begun on a stunningly positive note, with a diverse and bright student cohort and very committed faculty and staff, housed in a beautiful and well-appointed campus," says the professor.

APPSC-IIT BOMBAY
Ambedkar Periyar Phule Study Circle

9 SEGREGATION OF MESS AREAS IN IITs GARNERS ACCUSATIONS OF CASTEISM

AT IIT Bombay, "vegetarian only" posters appeared in a section of a mess and the institute imposed a fine of ₹10,000 on a student who attempted to eat there. Even IIT Hyderabad quietly introduced a separate veg-only dining hall.

Calling those who eat meat 'impure' and those who do not eat meat as 'pure' becomes a symbolic way of reinforcing superiority of savarnas over others — Member, Ambedkar Periyar Phule Study Circle (APPSC), IIT Bombay

10 SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT INDRAPRASTHA COLLEGE BY OUTSIDERS DURING FEST

ON March 28, "unknown" men scaled the walls of Indraprastha College for Women (IPCW, affiliated with Delhi University), during their annual fest and harassed the students – particularly those who are gender minorities. This is not the first time this has happened at a college, bringing up the question of the security of students. Hence, in November, the Delhi High Court asked Delhi Police, DU and IP University to frame standard operating procedures for security measures at college fests.

EXPRESS ILLUSTRATION

College campuses must be safe spaces for their students... We protested because we needed to reclaim the campus as ours
— Shambhavi, All India Students' Association, North Zone Convenor, DU

11 EDUCATION WELCOMES THE AI WAVE

THE arrival of the generative AI tool ChatGPT has taken the world by storm – with a few students even testing its capabilities against competitive tests and exams. It was revealed that the chatbot could not only clear MBA and Law School entrance exams in the USA but also Google's coding test. However, it fared terribly in the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE), only getting 11 questions right.

Performance in exams notwithstanding, the integration of AI tools like ChatGPT has begun in India. For instance, India saw its first AI school coming up at Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala on August 25, arming its teachers with an array of resources.

We will work on constructing informed public opinion to push against misinformation and misrepresentation of the Palestinian cause — Dr Maya John, DU

12 ACADEMIC DISCOURSE ON PALESTINE STIFLED?

FROM an online lecture by former DU Professor Achin Vanaik at OP Jindal Global University titled The History and Politics of the Palestinian Present to Professor Sharmistha Saha of IIT Bombay receiving flak for organising a screening of a Palestinian documentary — academic freedom when it comes to talking about the Israel-Hamas war on campus was stifled.

The IMA has been demanding that the Centre introduce laws that criminalise attacks on healthcare professionals, just like the Indian Government passed the Epidemic Diseases (Amendment) Act (2020) — Dr Sharad Agarwal, National President, Indian Medical Association

13 ATTACKS ON JUNIOR RESIDENTS AND MEDICAL INTERNS

ATTENDEES of a patient in the Government Medical College, Jammu, attacked a junior doctor on November 26. Before that, 23-year-old Dr Vandana Das was brutally stabbed to death by the very patient that she was treating on May 10. These are only a few incidents among the increasing cases of violence against medical interns and junior resident doctors in the country this year.

14 RESURGENCE OF SKILL INDIA

THE Skill India campaign has seen a resurgence in 2023 due to several government initiatives. While presenting the Union Budget for 2023-24, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman proposed the launch of a unified Skill India Platform. Later, in October this year, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan also launched the IndiaSkills 2023-24 programme, which is a precursor to the WorldSkills competition – an international event to raise the recognition of vocational skill-holders.

WHAT PLAGUED EDTECHS?
- Layoffs
- Fund crunch
- Value plummeting

15 Crisis in Byju's upends India's EdTech sector

ONE of the most shocking headlines has been the crisis triggered in the EdTech sector, inducing layoffs and an overall decline in growth. In September, it was reported that the total funding for EdTechs plunged to 48% from January 1, 2023, to August 7, 2023. Most strikingly, BYJU'S value plummeted from 22 billion USD to between 5.1 billion USD and 8.4 billion USD.

16 MANIPUR STUDENTS DISPLACED

ONE of the most tragic consequences of the violence in Manipur has been the displacement of children and adolescents in the state. As per the Manipur government, over 14,000 children have been displaced. However, Kerala, Delhi and others agreed to let displaced students from Manipur join their schools, colleges, and universities to finish their education.

MISTER CHANCELLOR DONT SPIT POISON & PAN PARAG ON UNIVERSITIES
സി.പി.യെ വെട്ടിയ നാടാണേ.!!
SFI UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

17 OPPOSITION STATE GOVERNORS AND GOVERNMENTS CLASH, EDUCATION LOSES

THIS year, state governments were at loggerheads with their state governors over various educational matters — be it over the National Entrance-cum-Eligibility Test (NEET) in Tamil Nadu, or appointments of vice-chancellor in Kerala and West Bengal. However, these political brickbats have left the education sector in limbo in the states, academics from affected universities from these states allege. For instance, the unfolding chaos in Kerala between Governor Arif Mohammed Khan and the ruling party CPI (M)'s student wing, Students' Federation of India.

18 FIRST DRAFT OF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK LAUNCHED

AMIDST the brouhaha over the rationalisation of NCERT textbooks, the Union Ministry of Education released an initial draft of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) in August. As per the ministry, they would release new textbooks based on the NCF from the next academic session. As per the NCF, the existing 10+2 system of school education would be replaced by a 5+3+2+2 structure and Board exams will be held twice a year. The NCF aims to develop linguistic proficiency in at least three languages among students by the time they turn 15 years old.

19 PREVALENCE OF RAGGING DESPITE PREVENTIVE NORMS?

511 RAGGING CASES IN 2023

STATISTICS from the Anti-Ragging Cell of the University Grants Commission (UGC) showed 511 ragging cases reported in 2023. While this is a decrease from 810 cases of ragging reported last year, this number still proves the persistence of ragging in Indian higher educational institutes (HEIs). Despite anti-ragging guidelines introduced by the UGC, this year, a few cases of ragging even took a criminal turn – case in point, the ragging and resultant suicide of Swapnodeep Kundu, a first-year undergraduate student of Jadavpur University in West Bengal.

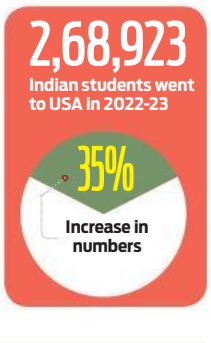
NO TO NExT, SAVE MEDICAL EDUCATION
On the occasion of ALL INDIA PROTEST WEEK
PROTEST DEMONSTRATION on DOCTORS' DAY
AIDSO WB State Medical Unit

20 NEET-PG VS NEXT CONUNDRUM

WHEN the National Medical Commission (NMC) proposed the National Exit Test (NExT) as a single licentiate and eligibility test for MBBS graduates to replace NEET PG and Foreign Medical Graduate Examination starting with 2019 batch, students were up in arms. Hence, NMC had to defer it until further notice. Career coach Jayaprakash Gandhi says, "There is nothing wrong with introducing a new exam, but students need to be given clarity."

21 ENROLMENT OF INDIAN STUDENTS IN USA AT AN ALL-TIME HIGH

THE United States of America has always been a popular education destination for Indian students. This is once again established by the Open Doors Report 2023, which says that 2,68,923 Indian students went to the USA to study in the academic year 2022-23. These numbers are a 35% increase from last year and an all-time high for India. Also, India is the top target for graduate and UG hiring, as for Indian students, 70% of American varsities prioritise UG outreach and 80% prioritise graduate outreach.

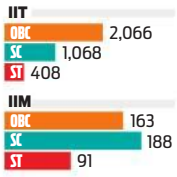


22 UNION BUDGET: INCREASE IN ALLOCATION FOR EDUCATION

In the Union Budget of 2023, the Department of School Education and Literacy saw a 15.6% increase in budget allocation from ₹59,503 crores in 2022-23 to ₹68,805 crores in 2023-24. Also, ₹4,000 crore was set out in for the Pradhan Mantri Schools For Rising India (PM-SHRI) initiative. In an 8% increase, the Department of Higher Education was given a sizable budget allocation of ₹44,094 crores. Overall, the education sector saw a total increase in the budget of 13%.

23 SC/ST DROPOUTS FROM PREMIER INSTITUTES IN INDIA

OVER 13,600 reserved category students dropped out from central universities, Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) in the last five years. While data on NLU dropouts is unavailable, central varsities face a graver situation compared to state or deemed universities. These are not just numbers but a compelling tale about the lives of marginalised students at India's premier institutes.



— *With inputs from* ***Mrittika Banerjee***